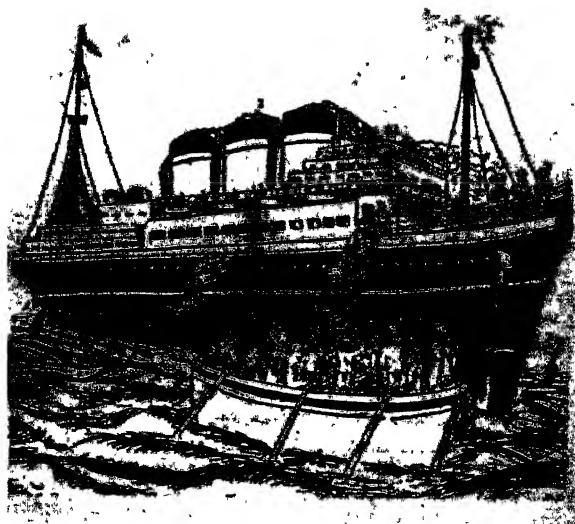




# INDIANS OVERSEAS

BY

DR. LANKASUNDARAM, M.A., PH.D. (LOND.)



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# INDIANS OVERSEAS<sup>7</sup>

A STUDY IN ECONOMIC-SOCIOLOGY

BY

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Affairs.

G. A. NATESAN & CO.

MADRAS

1933





TO

ANNA

A Broken Reed



## PREFACE

---

**W**HEN the Hon'ble Mr. G. A. Natesan suggested to me a few months back that I should undertake to write a monograph on **INDIANS OVERSEAS** to serve the special needs of the layman both in India and in emigrant countries, I readily undertook the task as a matter of urgent importance. I was confident that my qualifications for bringing out a monograph of this kind are meagre, but I felt inclined to the view that a systematic survey of this type at the present time is a national duty.

Three years ago I had the opportunity of submitting a Memorandum on "The International Aspects of Indian Emigration" to the Imperial Conference in London. My researches in the archives of the India Office and Colonial Office have helped me considerably in my present work. In the same year, I assisted the Ceylon Indian

Deputation to the Colonial Office as Secretary, and had the opportunity of understanding the manifold detail connected with any such public activity. In 1931 I visited Ceylon and systematically studied the problems of Indian labour in that Colony. I am persuaded to believe that these and other facilities have given me the necessary "atmosphere" in which a study of the type attempted in the following pages should be worked out.

If I could focus the attention of the Government and the people of India, as also of Indian nationals abroad, on some of the urgent problems facing our countrymen overseas and help in their solution, I shall feel satisfied that my labours have not been in vain.

LANKA SUNDARAM.

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# CONTENTS

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	PAGE
Chapter I. Introductory Survey ...	1
Chapter II. The <i>Kangani</i> System for Ceylon and Malaya ...	21
Chapter III. Indians in Ceylon ...	34
Chapter IV. Indians in Malaya ...	57
Chapter V. The Indenture System	76
Chapter VI. Indians in the West Indies System ...	86
Chapter VII. Indians in Fiji, Mauritius and Canada ...	109
Chapter VIII. Indians in East Africa...	132
Chapter IX. Indians in the Union of South Africa ...	149
Chapter X. Epilogue ...	170
Bibliography ...	i

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# INDIANS OVERSEAS

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## CHAPTER I

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### INTRODUCTORY SURVEY

**I**T is almost a truism to say that the present-day problems of Indian emigration overseas have assumed serious proportions. In fact, the word "crisis" may be fittingly applied to the set of phenomena which we are witnessing in almost every country where our nationals find themselves entrenched to-day. The world economic depression of the past three years has no doubt accelerated the pace of the tightening grip of restrictions imposed by the emigrant countries. But the real facts remain that our countrymen, once highly prized as the most efficient and willing tools for the tropical exploitation of Imperial Powers, have now become suspect and unwelcome in some countries, while in others dislocation in the economic fabric has



produced severe deployment and distress among our overseas nationals.

Naturally our attention is closely fixed upon the developments in the South African Continent. Problems connected with the civic and political franchise of Indians in Kenya and Tanganyika pale into insignificance before the threatened revival of *Satyagraha* in the Transvaal as a protest against the invidious Asiatic Land Tenure Act now in operation there. In Ceylon there is a faint but clear cry against Indian immigration of the labouring classes. Chronic unemployment among the Indian urban workers, who are totally unprotected and unlooked after, severe exodus of Indian estate population consequent to the closing down of several uneconomic estates, and prospects of double taxation of our merchant community in the island are all matters of considerable gravity. In British Malaya, the cry is: "Repatriate the Indian worker and thus relieve present congestion." Certainly last year's repatriation of our nationals by the Malaya Government has attained a really

gigantic magnitude. From the far-off British Guiana and Trinidad a similar tale of distress is our legacy. The Calcutta disturbances of last October and November are still fresh in public memory. Repatriation, compulsory or assisted, is no solvent of all emigrant problems. It costs the exchequer of the immigrant countries considerably, while the returned Indian colonials do not find themselves readily absorbable by the mother country. The Calcutta disturbances and the failure of the South African repatriation scheme are sufficient indications of the fact that even good-natured repatriation suffers from the above defects of compulsory transshipment of unfortunate overseas Indians.

Such are the present indices of a century-old problem. Two and a half millions of Indians are now found scattered all over the world, from Gibraltar to Fiji, from Hong Kong to British Columbia. If the ordinary economic factors prompting the emigration of Western communities have fully operated at any rate during the middle of the

century, the present problems connected with Indians overseas would never have existed. Despite the fact that between thirty to sixty per cent. of our population is in dire want of the minimum necessities of life, the migratory instinct is practically non-existent among the Indian peasantry, free emigration beyond the seas being unthinkable.

If this is the case, how is it that there are twenty-five lakhs of Indian emigrants all over the world? The explanation is simple. Two aspects are evident. Whenever there was an unprecedented calamity in a particular locality in India, there was a tendency among the labouring population to drift to the nearest available territory where there are opportunities for temporary relief. The history of Indian emigration to Ceylon is predominantly determined by the annual season and crop conditions of the Madras Presidency. Such again is the case of Indian immigration into Assam, Burma and Malaya on the one hand, and of the trans-frontier movements into Nepal, China, Afghanistan

and Persia. Emigration of this type is unsteady, temporary and, as such, does not complicate the major issues of inter-State emigration to the extent to which permanent settlement and vested interests of our nationals in the emigrant countries would.

The second aspect is that of emigration to distant countries, which had more or less tended towards permanent settlement. The most unfortunate feature of Indian emigration of this type was, what Mr. C. F. Andrews so appositely called, the "artificial pressure of recruitment" which evolved a stereotyped system of indentured labour and had the legal recognition and support of the Government of India until it was abolished in 1921. Emigration of this kind had been almost entirely parasitic in character. Round this nucleus of imported indentured labourers was built up a ring of free Indians who, in process of time, acquired specific rights and economic interests in the colonies concerned. After re-indenturing was penalised, emigrants who were originally bound by contract to colonial estates became free and sought

employment in open markets. The progeny of the indentured emigrant, if too young for indenture before it left India, and the colonial born Indian remained free, unless compelled by economic necessity to enter into engagements similar to those of the indentured labourers.

Besides these, there were people who formed independent settlements overseas. To a certain extent facilities were from time to time available for a limited number of Indians of the commercial classes to establish trades specially suited to the localities where Indian indentured workers were congregated. Little by little these free emigrants formed compact communities in the overseas colonies and acquired specific vested interests after generations of toil, frugality and clean living.

The present-day problems of Indian emigration centre round the atmosphere created and sustained by a century of Imperial colonial history and governmental policy in India. The abolition of slavery by Great Britain in 1834 and by the French

National Assembly in 1849, which abrogated the *code noir*, created a great hiatus in the field of tropical exploitation. Negro labour, once so cheap and submissive, became as a result of manumission shy and at times restive, thus becoming uneconomic. What with this negroid relapse into the nomadic stage and the ever increasing demand for efficient labour, Colonial Governments a century ago felt an urgent necessity for a continuous flow of serviceable and cheap labouring population.

In Ceylon, fruitless efforts were made to bring in the manumitted African slaves and also the Chinese with a view to agricultural colonization. In 1859 the Corporation of Durban frantically petitioned the Governor of Natal praying that his good offices might be used to persuade the Indian Government to permit a certain number of our peasant workers being shipped to South Africa for absorbtion there. Actually, organised emigration of Indian labourers was started by the French Government from their settlements at Karikal and Pondicherry, which proved

to be a flourishing trade entirely to the benefit of the capitalists interested in the sugar industry of the Antilles and Reunion. The Anglo-French Convention of 1861 legalised the export of Indian indentured labourers to the French colonies. Fortunately this arrangement was terminated in 1883. Even though further efforts were made a decade later to revive this system, a shameful chapter in the early history of Indian emigration was put an end to by the abrogation of the Anglo-French Convention.

Indian emigration overseas is either British or foreign. There are thirteen British colonies, five French colonies and one Dutch and one Danish colony each to which organised emigration of Indian workers was at one time or another sanctioned by the Government of India. It is in the very nature of things that there is much difficulty in dealing with emigration to foreign colonies concerning which information is scanty. From the numerical point of view, Indian emigrants to British colonies are of great importance.

Surinam or Dutch Guiana is the only exception.

The classification of colonies, particularly British, is of immense interest from the viewpoint of the material welfare of the Indian emigrant. As a rule, the greater the degree of representative government enjoyed by the colonies, the greater the amount of difficulty experienced by the Indian settler. Here it is interesting for us to have a general classification of colonies with different forms of government enjoying different degrees of internal and political autonomy. First, comes the group of Crown Colonies in which the Crown has entire control of legislation, while the administration is carried on by public officers under the control of the Home Government. Demerara or British Guiana, Jamaica and Mauritius belong to this category. Next in our list figure colonies possessing representative institutions in which the Crown has only a veto on legislation, but the Home Government retains the control of public officers. Leeward Islands, Windward Islands, the Straits Settlements, Fiji and



Ceylon belong to this class. Third, comes the group of Overseas Dominions with responsible government in which the Crown, though nominally possessing the veto on indigenous legislation (even this nominal privilege has been disturbed by the recent Statute of Westminster), leaves the Home Government powerless to exercise administrative control. For our purpose the Union of South Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand constitute examples. The Dutch colony of Surinam may be classed as belonging to the second category.

A geographical classification of colonies to which Indian emigration was permitted at one time or another, and is in certain cases still allowed, is very helpful in our study. These countries may be divided into four groups as hereunder :

- I. Colonies of the Indian System :
  - i. Ceylon.
  - ii. Federated & Unfederated Malay States & the Straits Settlements.
- II. Colonies of the Pacific Ocean :
  - i. Fiji.
  - ii. New Caledonia.

- III. Colonies of the South Indian Ocean :
- i. The Union of South Africa and East Africa in general.
  - ii. Mauritius.
  - iii. Reunion.
- IV. Colonies of the West Indian System :
- i. Foreign :
    - (a) St. Croix.
    - (b) Guadeloupe.
    - (c) Martinique.
    - (d) Cayenne.
    - (e) Surinam.
  - ii. British :
    - (a) Demarara (British Guiana).
    - (b) Trinidad.
    - (c) Jamaica.
    - (d) Grenada.
    - (e) St. Vincent.
    - (f) St. Lucia.
    - (g) St. Kitts.
    - (h) Nevis.

Besides these colonies to which indentured Indian emigration was legal at one time or another, there are at the present day a considerable number of Indian settlers in British Columbia (Canada), California (the U. S A.), Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, New Zealand and other places. The Union of South Africa stands in a separate class by itself, on account of the

extensive nature of the problems of Indian domiciled interests and the numerous Special Ordinances discriminating against Indian settlers which were passed by the Union Government particularly during the past fifty years.

The law of early colonial emigration is contained in the Indian Emigration Act of 1877 (which superseded earlier Acts such as Act XIV of 1839 and Act XIII of 1869), and the rules thereunder regulating emigration from the ports of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, together with the conventions with France of 1861, with Denmark of 1863 and with Holland of 1870. In a despatch of May 1877 to the Secretary of State for India in regard to emigration, the policy of the Government was described as that of seeing fair play between the parties to a commercial transaction, whilst altogether abstaining from the bargain. The Government, however, stood towards the emigrants in the position of the protector of the weak and ignorant, bound to supply their deficiencies with their fuller knowledge so that, as far as possible,

they might be placed upon an equality with the more robust races with whom they have to deal, and that in the contract which they entered into with those who made a bid for their labour they might not be worsted or imposed upon. It was not a policy directly to stimulate emigration. It was thought that such a course would be liable to popular misconstruction and would create embarrassing relations with foreign and colonial administrations. The latter, it was considered, should look not to the Indian authorities but to their agents for the promotion and quality of their labour supply. As such, it will be seen that the Government of India at this period only permitted colonial emigration but did not actually encourage it.

Notwithstanding this paternal interest of the Government of India, Indian emigration abroad during the nineteenth century had been extremely unsatisfactory and the Government had at various times been compelled to stop such emigration without distinction of the emigrants' destination being British or foreign colonies.

The Government of India despatch, quoted above, describes the early system of recruitment as follows :

Colonial Governments appoint persons of approved character to conduct emigration on their behalf from the Presidency Towns of India. These agents employ recruiters, of whose respectability they are required to convince the Government Protector of Emigrants; these recruiters persuade persons to emigrate and take them before the Magistrates, who register the engagements. The recruits are then conveyed to Calcutta, Madras or Bombay where they are housed under the immediate eye of the emigration agent in depots, which have been licensed as fit places for the collection of emigrants by the Protector. They are thence shipped on board vessels which are also licensed, care being taken that they are equipped in every respect with what is needed to ensure the safety of the passengers on their long voyage and there the direct concern of the Government with the transaction ends.

It is only to be expected that as a sequel to the attitude of benevolent neutrality of our Government of the last century, the history of Indian emigration was replete with numerous examples, which bear testimony to the misery and privation of the ignorant and

timid emigrants who had never possessed any bargaining capacity. Information regarding living conditions overseas was scanty and in the general scramble for an adequate labour supply, the employing agencies in some instances grew to be extremely secretive. Numerous legislative enactments were passed amending the Act of 1871 and introducing several provisions calculated to improve the material welfare of the Indian emigrant. Such were the Amending Acts of 1890, 1896, 1897, 1902, and 1908. Act XVII of 1908 was a consolidating Act. Further enactments such as the Act XIV of 1910, the acceptance by Lord Hardinge of the resolution of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya for the abolition of the indentured system in 1916 which resulted in the Emigration Act of 1922, further amended in 1927, bring up the Indian legislation relative to overseas emigration to the present day. Numerous committees and deputations inquired into the question of the prosperity of the Indian emigrations overseas, but our knowledge of

their living conditions is not as yet complete.

It must be remembered that the Act of 1922 is a turning point in the history of Indian emigration. Since then even under the present unsatisfactory constitution, the central legislature in India has come to wield considerable influence upon the policy of the Government at New Delhi. The Reciprocity Resolution of the Imperial Conference of 1918 has accelerated the process under which popular control of emigration policy in India became really effective. A Standing Committee of both the houses of the Central Parliament has come into being as a watch-dog of the interests of our nationals overseas. The Government of India have appointed their Agents in South Africa, Ceylon and British Malay to safeguard our interests in those countries. Particularly in the latter countries, the prestige of the *Raj* has been sufficient to induce their Governments to conform to the requirements of the Indian Legislature. As regards the Union of South

Africa, the Cape Town Round Table Conferences of 1927 and 1932, and the agreements reached as a result thereof, represent a great headway towards the closer knitting together of our country with the Dark Continent. The Imperial Conferences of the post-War era also gave us a considerable venue for Imperial co-operation in matters touching the prosperity of our nationals abroad. The International Conference on Emigration and Immigration, held at Rome in 1924, has considerably strengthened our hands as one of its resolutions, to which India was a party, sanctified the contractual rights of immigrants wherever they are. Keen interest in the Mother Country about the fate of our nationals abroad and missions such as those undertaken by people of the calibre of the Rt Hon'ble V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, Dewan Bahadur T. Rangachariar, and Mr. C. F. Andrews during recent years have been extremely helpful.

The following statement indicates the various stages at which collective Indian emigration was sanctioned by the Government of India. Very few countries mentioned in



the list continue to receive immigrants at the present day. In fact, organised emigration, with the exception of the special type prevalent in the case of Ceylon and Malaya, has been definitely suspended.

#### BRITISH COLONIES

Mauritius, 1842.  
British Guiana, 1845.  
Trinidad, 1845.  
Jamaica, 1845.  
Grenada, 1846  
St. Lucia, 1857.  
St. Kitts, 1860.  
Natal, 1860.  
St. Vincent, 1861.  
Nevis, 1873.  
Fiji, 1879.

#### FRENCH COLONIES

Reunion, 1860  
Cayenne, 1860.  
Guadeloupe, 1873.  
Martinique, 1874.

#### DUTCH COLONIES

St. Croix, 1862.  
Surinam (Dutch Guiana), 1873.

Statistical data relating to the actual number of Indians overseas is not available in any one place. Through the courtesy of the Department of Education, Health, and Lands of the

Government of India, the following Table is constructed :

## AFRICA

## 1. South Africa :

Transvaal, 1926	...	15,747
Cape Province, 1926		6,655
Natal, 1930	...	142,979
Orange Free State, 1926	...	127

## 2. East Africa :

Kenya, 1931	...	45,000	} Esti- mates only.
Uganda, 1931	...	14,000	
Tanganyika, 1931	...	25,000	
Zanzibar, 1924	...	12,846	

## AMERICA

British Guiana, 1930	...	130,075
Trinidad, 1930	...	133,277
Jamaica, 1930	...	17,599
Surinam, 1920	...	34,957

## ASIA

Malaya, 1931	...	627,720
Mauritius, 1930	...	279,143
Ceylon, 1931	(Estimate),	900,000

## AUSTRALIA

Fiji, 1930	...	76,722
------------	-----	--------

Besides this official statement of the position of Indians overseas we must remember that motley, nonetheless important, groups of Indians are to be found in other parts of the world. From the information I am able to glean from sources like Ferenczi's *International Migrations, Vol I*, we may fill up the gaps in the following manner :

Portuguese East Africa	(1928)	...	8,475
Egypt	(1927)	.	821
Soudan	(1927)	...	525
British Columbia		...	1,016
Panama		...	300
Cuba		..	1,000
Mexico		..	256
Brazil		..	44
Palestine		...	2,018
Australia	(1921)	...	2,620
New Zealand	(1926)	...	951
Madagascar		...	182

The above statements give us a complete picture of our overseas interests as far as statistical information can go. The ramifications of Indian emigration abroad are thus difficult to unravel clearly. The following pages will be devoted to a discussion of these difficult problems in as judicious and thorough a manner as possible.

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## CHAPTER II

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### THE KANGANI SYSTEM FOR CEYLON AND MALAYA

THE economic condition of the Indian emigrants is largely determined by the methods of recruitment pursued by the various employing agencies of the Colonial Empires. It is no exaggeration to say that methods of recruitment decide once for all the role which the emigrant has to play in the land of his destination. The methods of recruitment in vogue for the colonies of the Indian system—Ceylon and Malaya—are quite different to those of the others. Comparative contiguity to India is almost a premonition with the Indian emigrant to these colonies. Recruitment is only for a short period and the oscillations of labour emigration are at once frequent and intermittent.

Ever since the beginnings of Indian labour emigration to Ceylon, recruitment has been

conducted by *kanganis*—Indian labourers—who have seen service in the island and who visit the mainland for the specific purpose of finding labourers for colonial employment. The Ceylon Labour Commission of 1908 described this system in the following manner :

This system is . . . . . of a purely patriarchal character, in its origin and principles. The *kangani*, or the labour headman, was in the beginning, and still is, in a large number of the older and more solidly established estates, the senior member of a family group composed of his personal relatives, to whom may be added other families drawn from villages in Southern India from the vicinity of which he and his relations also come. The labour force thus formed is subdivided into a number of smaller groups, each under its patriarch, the sub or *silara-kangani*; and the family principle is further manifested in the groups which are under these minor headmen, a man with his wife and children and, it may be one or more close relations assuming joint responsibility for advances made to them and holding their earnings in some sort in common.

Under the Emigration Rules of the Indian Act of 1922, the recruiter or *kangani* must be an Indian of the labouring class and

must have been employed as a labourer under an employer in Ceylon and Malaya, for whose service he desires to obtain labourers from Southern India. Even though in some cases *kanganis* on Ceylon estates are sent to India on special recruiting journeys, a very large proportion of the labour force is attracted to the island by sub-*kanganis* or by old employees when they go to the mainland for a holiday. On the return journey to Ceylon they invariably bring back with them a few friends and neighbours from their home or neighbouring villages. Family recruitment is the predominant mode and very seldom do single men offer themselves for recruitment. The practically equal sex ratio in the Indian estate population in Ceylon is considered a very satisfactory feature of the situation.

Under the 1922 Regulations, when a recruiter or a potential recruiter is about to leave for India, or when any former employee of a colonial estate happens to be in India and wishes to recruit, the employer

or estate proprietor makes an application to the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour at Colombo, who scrutinises the names of the would-be recruiters to make sure that they are not on the black list. Such applications as are found to be in order are endorsed by the Controller and passed on to the Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon for his counter-signature. When the latter's endorsement is fixed, the application is sent back to the Controller's Office. Copies intended for the District Magistrate of the District in India, whence recruitment is intended to be effected, and for the use of the Ceylon Emigration Commissioner at Trichinopoly, are sent to the latter's office. The *kangani's* copy is forwarded to the employer in question, who sees to its delivery to the *kangani* in whose name it is drawn.

On arrival in India, the *Kangani* hands in his copy at one of the various agencies of the Ceylon Emigration Commissioner in Southern India for final endorsement. If the copy intended for a *kangani* who is already

in India, is forwarded to the Emigration Commissioner, the *kangani* in question calls for this document and completes it by affixing his signature or thumb-impression, not only to his own but also to those intended for the use of the District Magistrate and the Emigration Commissioner. The application is then endorsed by the Emigration Commissioner, who files his copy and forwards the District Magistrate's copy to that Officer.

The above formalities having been gone through, the *kangani* is deemed to have obtained licence and is authorised to recruit within one year twenty labourers, exclusive of those classified by the Act of 1922 as dependants and non-emigrants. The names of the emigrant recruits are then noted on the back of the *kangani's* licence and each intending emigrant has to be produced before the village *munsiff*. The *munsiff* ascertains whether the family of the candidate in question has any objection to his departure and whether the emigrant himself is aware of the conditions attached to his emigration. If



there is no objection, the *munsiff* initials the entry on the *kangani's* licence.

After certification by the village *munsiff*, the recruit is passed on to the local agency to get his name registered. He is then passed on to the Ceylon Emigration Headquarters at Trichinopoly where further examination takes place, not only by the staff of this office but also by an Inspector of Emigration as to the recruit's physical fitness. If rejected, he is sent back to his village at the expense of the Emigration Fund. If successful, he is sent to the quarantine camp either at Mandapam or Tataparai. Here he is examined by the Medical Officers of both the Indian and Ceylon Governments. After the specific period of quarantine expires, he is taken to the port of embarkation : Dhanuskodi or Tuticorin, and shipped to Talaimannar or Colombo in Ceylon, as the case may be. After a further period of quarantine at the port of arrival in the Island, the labourers are dispatched to the estates for whose purposes they are recruited.

Such is the general system of recruitment which is in vogue for the tea and rubber

estates of Ceylon. Recruitment for Malaya pursues an almost identical line, but during recent years a radical change is noticeable. The patriarchal principle of the *kangani* system is fast dying out. What with the greater mobility of Indian labour and the popularity amongst the peasants of South India of employment in Ceylon and Malaya, recruitment of the old *kangani* type has undergone fundamental changes. The Indian Act of 1922, as has been already adverted to above, defines the *kangani* as a recruiter belonging to the labouring class, which is in keeping with the more recent practice of the employing agencies to license such labourers who undertake a cross-sea voyage to the mainland for the customary periodical holiday to bring back with them additional labourers.

Unlike the Ceylonese method, the Government of India have temporarily exempted Malaya from the operation of Rule 23 of the Indian Emigration Rules of 1923 which requires that the number of men, whether unmarried or unaccompanied by their wives, who may be assisted to emigrate, must not

exceed one in five persons. This was intended to reproduce in the Malaya system the healthy principle of an equal sex ratio among emigrant labourers which is freely operating in its Ceylonese counterpart.

It is interesting to note that the *kangani* system of recruitment, though efficient, costs the employing agencies considerably. The Ceylon estates pay Rs. 10 to the *kangani* for every labourer he recruits after the labourer has served the appointed estate for a given period of time, normally from six months to a year. Other estates pay the *kangani*, an advance for himself, whilst still others pay nothing and consider the *kangani's* commission to consist of head-money, generally two cents for a head-*kangani*, and three to four cents for a sub-*kangani*, daily received by them from each individual labourer who works on the estates under their supervision. Of late a more regularised system has come into vogue. For the Malaya service each recruiting labourer gets a similar amount of Rs. 10 for each labourer recruited, but instead of the

estates paying the commission in advance, as in the case of Ceylon, an efficient credit system in Madras finances the service.

It was estimated in 1928-1929 that, omitting capital expenditure, every assisted labourer brought into Ceylon cost the colony Rs. 21·37—indeed a very economic outlay. This sum covers not only the cost of transport, quarantine, feeding and housing of labourers *en route*, and most of the recruiting *kangani's* expenses but also the repatriation of the sick and disabled and of settling labour disputes and other expenses connected with the protection and inspection of the Indian immigrant labourers. Naturally owing to the longer cross-sea voyage involved, such *per capita* expenditure in the Malaya service comes to something more than in the case of Ceylon. All this expenditure is borne by the Immigration Fund established in both these colonies, which consist of acreage fees from the employing estates, contributions by the Colonial Governments, licence fees from employers not paying acreage fees, bank

interest on accumulated balances and other miscellaneous receipts. One point which is not usually known in India, is that the cost of the establishments of Indian Agents in Ceylon and Malaya are not chargeable to Indian revenues but are entirely borne by the Colonial administrations.

During 1930-1931, however, on account of special circumstances, the cost of bringing an Indian estate labourer to a Ceylon Estate averaged Rs. 25.96. The recruitment allowance, which is payable to estates out of the Indian Immigration Fund, has been reduced from Rs. 10 to Rs. 2.50 on June 27, 1931. On the contrary, as regards Malaya, such allowances were enhanced in 1928 to 10 dollars for married labourers accompanied by their wives and 8 dollars for single men (which leaves a comfortable balance to the estate-owners over and above the 10 rupees per head for each recruited labourer paid on the employers' account to the recruiting *kanganis*) in order to give a stimulus to recruitment. Of course such concessions are withdrawn.

in Malaya during the present depression period.

Recent reports from our Agents in these two Colonies indicate that the *kangani* system has outlived its purpose. Irregular recruitment is not altogether unknown, and numerous cases of criminal prosecution have been brought before the Indian and Colonial Courts to rectify such abuses which range from recruitment of persons below 18 years of age to the seduction, abduction and kidnapping of women. An urgent reform in this line would be a careful selection by employers of *kanganis* sent over to India.

So far we have dealt with assisted emigration in the Ceylon and Malaya services. Besides these subsidised emigrants, considerable numbers of Indian workers finance their journey to Ceylon and Malaya with a view to obtaining useful employment overseas. For Ceylon, what all that is necessary is that the outgoing Indian labourers must undergo the necessary medical and quarantine tests. Except during these days

of depression, no difficulty was ever experienced by our workers to find employment in Ceylon as urban labourers. In the case of Malaya also, such free emigration does prevail and any Indian labourer intending to seek his fortune, offering himself either at Madras or Negapatam—the ports of embarkation for Penang and Port Sewttenham—is afforded every facility to do so. But with this difference that, unlike in Ceylon, such free emigrants receive on arrival in the colony from the Labour Department, through the Indian Immigration Fund, a sum of 2 dollars for each adult and 1 dollar for each minor dependant. These payments are intended to popularise voluntary emigration from India, even though such unassisted emigrants have to seek their way in the open colonial markets.

Mr. C. F. Andrews, and the Royal Commission on Labour in India, have stressed the necessity for the encouragement of the voluntary system of Indian emigration. The Whitley Commission wrote :

The main criterion which must be satisfied by any scheme of control is, that it must give a reasonable prospect of eliminating itself. We regard as one of the gravest defects of the present system the tendency to perpetuate itself. The aim of recruiting should be to reach a point where, in effect, organized recruiting is unnecessary. In other words, by making conditions sufficiently attractive, the employer should reach the stage where, instead of having to go out and induce recruits to enter his employment, applicants for employment approach the employer.

In fact, they go a step further and suggest that every province in India from which organised emigration takes place, must provide for forwarding agencies of a more or less voluntary type. If the present disabilities connected with the *kangani* system of recruitment are to disappear, emigration ought to be popular and voluntary.

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## CHAPTER III

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### INDIANS IN CEYLON

**B**OTH from the view-point of nearness to the mainland and from that of the numerical magnitude of our nationals in any single emigrant country, Ceylon claims our immediate attention. The intimacy with which the economic prosperity of the island is co-related to our own during centuries past is an important factor which is almost peculiar to Ceylon. It was in 1802 that Ceylon was lopped off from the administrative control of the Madras Presidency and created into a separate Crown Colony. A similar interaction of social forces between the Indian and the Sinhalese communities during the historical period has made it possible for the ready assimilation of the incoming Indian population by the Sinhalese people. Thus, to-day we find that nearly nine lakhs of people, or a little over a sixth of the total

population of Ceylon, are Indian emigrants. Of this nearly eight lakhs are estate population who, during the inter-censal period 1921-1931, showed an increase of 38·94 per cent. while the total population of the island attained a progression of only 17·94 per cent. Besides these, a few more lakhs inhabiting the northern districts, generally known as Jaffna Tamils, have settled down in Ceylon centuries ago and are considered to be part and parcel of the indigenous population. Thus, it will be seen that a substantial Tamil element is to be found in Ceylon which has remarkably altered the face and economic prospects of the island.

Even a century before the establishment of Government control of labour recruitment, which followed our Act VII of 1922, we find a constant flow of Indian labourers into Ceylon already in vogue. From 1843 to 1922 I was able to trace statistics relating to emigration to and from Ceylon and establish the fact that on an average something like twenty thousands of Indian labourers were annually left behind in Ceylon.

The latter half of the XIX century witnessed a] period of hectic plantation activity in the island. Between 1855 and 1885 coffee was the staple agricultural industry of Ceylon. In 1878 coffee reached its zenith, nearly three lakhs of acres, while tea occupied just under five thousand acres. Then followed the progressive cultivation of tea to the detriment of coffee production. The great Madras Famine of 1876-1877 prompted an abnormal exodus of our agricultural workers to Ceylon. But the decline of coffee production, allied with good crop seasons in South India between 1879 to 1886 resulted in an excess of departures over arrivals in the colony. Henceforward, the expansion of tea cultivation secured a normal annual excess of Indian arrivals over departures. The area under tea culture at various periods was as follows: 1885, 102 thousand acres, 1895, 384 thousand acres; 1915, 426 thousand acres. In 1925 the acreage under tea rose to 440 thousand acres, while the average for 1930-1931 shot up to 457 thousand acres. By 1915 coffee

had practically disappeared, while rubber which covered only 700 acres in 1898 recorded the phenomenal increase of five and a half lakhs of acres in 1930-1931. Other plantations such as cacao, cardamoms and cocoanuts also showed considerable increase. But the employment of Indian labourers is practically limited to tea and rubber since the latter category of plantations, perhaps with the exception of cocoanuts, are practically worked by the indigenous (Sinhalese) population.

With the introduction of Government control as a sequel to the Indian Act VII of 1922, which provoked the Ceylon Labour Ordinance No. 1 of 1923, a lot of administrative machinery has been created by the Governments of India and Ceylon under two categories. First, comes the machinery set up for the recruitment of labourers in South India. A Protector of Emigrants appointed by the Government of Madras, has his headquarters at Mandapam and is assisted by a medical officer belonging to our provincial medical service. These two

officers direct and supervise emigration on behalf of the Government of India. The Ceylon Government has its own Emigration Commissioner at Trichinopoly with assistants at the five local headquarters of the recruiting circles : Madura, Salem, Trichinopoly, Vellore and Mandapam. There are two quarantine camps of the Ceylon Government in South India at Mandapam, which is the place of accommodation for Dhanushkodi and at Tataparai for Tuticorin. At each of these places there are two medical officers of the Ceylon Government, the chief of whom acts as the representative of the Ceylon Emigration Commissioner.

In Ceylon, the interests of the Government of India are looked after by their Agent, a member of the Indian Civil Service, who is stationed at Kandy and assisted by an adequate staff. On behalf of the Government of Ceylon, the Department of Indian Immigrant Labour, which includes a Subsidiary Board of Immigration and Quarantine, with a Controller, medical and other assistants, and a considerable clerical staff looks after

the interests of the Indian labourers after their arrival in the island. Under the Donoughmore constitution of 1931 a new department of Labour, Industry and Commerce has been created and is fittingly entrusted to the charge of Mr. Peri Sundaram, an elected Indian member of the State Council.

Besides these official agencies, there are two unofficial bodies enjoying advisory but useful powers. They are : the Board of Indian Immigrant Labour at Colombo and a group of Wages Boards in different localities. In 1931, the Board of Indian Immigrant Labour consisted of eleven members, of whom two are elected Indian members of the State Council. The local Wages Boards are set up to assist the Government in the discharge of the duties imposed by the 1927 Ordinance, which is generally known as the Minimum Wage Ordinance, and which provides for the payment of a minimum wage to Indian estate labourers. Under this Ordinance the Board of Indian Immigrant Labour is the controlling authority over the various Estate Wages Boards and has the power to "confirm, vary

or cancel " their decisions. These Boards are sure to be of great help, provided the interests of Indian labourers are adequately and competently represented on them in the future activities of the Colonial Government for the betterment of labour conditions in Ceylon.

During the post-War period, several causes have contributed to the vast and progressive annual increase in the number of Indian labourers emigrating to Ceylon. In the first place, the ever-increasing expansion of the tea and rubber industries of the island demanded a proportionate increase in the labour force. Possibilities for the greater absorption of the indigenous (Sinhalese) labour are ruled out since it is not suitable for employment on plantations and refuses to be employed on estates situated at high altitudes. This is the reason why there is no competition between Sinhalese and Indian labour of the agricultural type; it is also the reason why Indians are concentrated in a few localities. In the second place, the establishment of Government control resulted in the elimination of,

risks hitherto faced by the emigrant and has thus also contributed to the expansion of Indian emigration to Ceylon. It must also be remembered that the land on which Indian labour is employed, in which cases alone estates are assessed for purposes of the Immigration Fund, is exclusively worked by Indian labour. In the case of tea plantations assessed, most of the work is done by imported Indian labour, but this is by no means the case in respect of plantations growing rubber, cacao and cardamoms, on which a considerable amount of Sinhalese labour is also employed. The cocoanut plantations are worked to a considerable extent by Indian labour, but are not assessed for purposes of the Immigration Fund

A few observations about the recent movements of Indian labour to and from Ceylon will be extremely interesting in our present study. During the past three years, tea and rubber collapsed, with the result that several estates in Ceylon, particularly rubber estates, have been compelled to be



closed down, thus displacing thousands of Indian labourers who are perforce compelled to return to the homeland. This crisis has been exploited by some jingo politicians in the island and the cry was put forward that no more Indians need be allowed to enter Ceylon. Even some of the level-headed people in Ceylon urge that, as regards the absorption of Indian labourers by the colony, the saturation point has already been reached. I believe that this argument is a myth and the following considerations prove its untenability :

1. Right through the past one hundred years, the flow of Indian labour has kept pace with the expansion of the staple agricultural industries of Ceylon.

2. As yet, Indian labour has not lost its freedom of movement and the general economic principle of supply approximating demand and *vice versa* has maintained its ground. The function of the Governments concerned is only to facilitate such movements through the agency of the Immigration Fund.

3. The increase in the number of Indians returning to India each year is only

evidence of the effect that Ceylon does not offer facilities to all for purposes of permanent settlement. Compared with total emigration only about 16 per cent. make the colony their permanent home, of course, with the usual allowance for visits to the mainland. As such, no capital need be made out of the present temporary feature of a larger outflow of Indians from Ceylon to India which has been necessitated by the prevailing economic depression.

4. Assisted and unassisted labourers emigrate in more or less equal numbers. Assisted estate labourers show a greater tendency to remain in the colony than unassisted labourers. Indeed, during the four years (1926-1929) preceding the present economic depression, the total balance of unassisted labourers remaining in Ceylon was only 3,490 or less than one per cent. while nearly one-third of the assisted labourers stayed away in the island. This is conclusive proof of our argument that, on account of the fact that Indian urban workers in Ceylon are unlooked

after, any worsening of the economic situation of the country leads to an outflow of our nationals back to India.

5. It is as yet premature to deduce from the Post-1929 statistics that Ceylon no longer needs Indian labour at all. Politicians may make much out of the present distressing situation, but the fundamental fact is still with us, and whether Ceylon likes it or not, Indian labour is a *sine qua non* for her very national existence. When once the economic depression is lifted, Ceylon would revert again to the old regime of required Indian labour immigration. Such indeed is the lesson of the past one hundred years of Indian labour and economic contribution to the island.

An interesting feature in Indian labour emigration to Ceylon is the localisation of the labour force both as regards to the place of origin and the place of absorption. In 1929, for instance, 91·5 per cent. of the assisted emigrants came, in the descending order of importance, from the following districts: Trichinopoly, Salem, Madura,

Ramnad, Arcot (North and South), Tanjore and Pudukottah. Similarly in Ceylon, out of the 9 provinces into which the island is divided, 54 per cent of the Indian estate population in 1928 was concentrated in the Central Province, and nearly 36 per cent. in the two provinces of Sabaragamuwa and Uva, the remaining 10 per cent. being scattered over the other provinces.

So far we have concentrated attention upon organised Indian emigration for absorption on the Ceylon estates. But there is another important feature of the Indian labour problem relating to the fortunes of the free and unassisted labourers which demands our attention. Unfortunately, neither the Ceylon nor the Indian Governments seem to realise the importance of this aspect. Want of statistical detail and other information about this category of our nationals in Ceylon is in the way of a thorough inquiry into this matter. But we must note that problems of Indian urban labour in the island are almost localised in Colombo. According to the

occupational census of Colombo in 1931, we glean the information that something like 25,000 unassisted Indian labourers and other workers find employment in the city itself as domestic servants, merchants, traders, salesmen and mercantile assistants, unspecified labourers and workers, rickshaw pullers, harbour workers and others employed in Government departments and public utility undertakings.

This class of Indian labour does not enjoy any protection worth the name and comparable to that enjoyed by their brethren on the estates. It has also to reckon with the competition of the Sinhalese, because it is mostly localised in Colombo and other urban centres. It is only recently that a Labour Party has been established in Ceylon, which is now trying to harness the Indian urban workers to the Trade Union Movement. One or two strikes have been successfully carried out by the harbour workers and other public utility services such as the Colombo Tramways. Under the ægis of the Labour Party, small efforts are now being made

towards giving the urban workers opportunities for collective bargaining and thus bringing them into line with the estate workers who enjoy fairly adequate Government protection. Still it remains a flagrant fact that a policy of neutrality, almost bordering on indifference, is being pursued by the Ceylon Government in regard to the comfort and well-being of the Indian urban workers. This policy must cease.

Turning now to the living conditions of Indians in Ceylon, we find our attention being rivetted to the minimum wages controversy which is now going on in the colony. It is admitted on all hands that the Indian estate labourer enjoys certain specific advantages in the island. First, he is offered security of tenure and is free from certain taxes and penal provisions for the recovery of debts which his Sinhalese co-worker is subjected to. Second, he has the guarantee of being sent back to India in case of ill-health or dissatisfaction, and, in the latter case, he can quit the estate without let or hindrance. Third, he enjoys a better social

status and atmosphere in Ceylon where caste restrictions are at a minimum.

It may be true that the Indian worker in Ceylon is better off than when he left the home country. But the question must be asked, is he well off in Ceylon? We must remember that even though the family principle is generally well maintained on the estates, the system of regimentation of the labourer's living conditions has certain disadvantages. Further, they have to work at high altitudes and are thus exposed to the rigours of a torrid climate which they are not accustomed to in India. Thus, comparisons between the living conditions in India and Ceylon are misleading and cannot be allowed to relieve the embarrassment of the plantation interests.

According to the Minimum Wages Ordinance of 1927, the following rates of wages have been established :

CLASS OF ESTATES.	MEN. CENTS.	WOMEN. CENTS.	CHILDREN. CENTS.
Low-Country ...	50	40	30
Mid-Country ...	52	41	31
Up-Country ...	54	43	32

The above rates are for a working hour of eight hours or of nine with an hour for

a mid-day meal, now that the Washington Hours Convention is applicable to Ceylon. Besides fixing these rates, an agreement of the Estates Wages Boards provides for the issue of clean and unblended rice of good quality to each working estate labourer at a cost not exceeding Rs. 6'40 a bushel. Children under 10 years of age are prohibited from employment on estates and receive one free meal a day.

Apprehension was felt when this Ordinance was first mooted that this minimum wage might possibly become the maximum wage, and the fears of the Indian community in Ceylon have been proved to be not altogether unfounded. Consequent on the fall of commodity prices, arrangements were made with the concurrence of the Government of India in May 1931 for the issue of rice at Rs. 4'80 per bushel. The planting interests stressing the general decline in the cost of living and the depression in the tea and the rubber trades, pressed for an all round reduction of 20 per cent. in the scheduled minimum wages of the Indian estate workers.



After a protracted period of controversy, this schedule has, on the assumption that the labourer's cost of living had fallen by 15, 16 and 17 per cent. respectively in the up-, mid- and low-country districts, been watered down considerably. The up-country districts have, however, on account of their relative prosperity, been exempted from this cut. The rates of wages as from February 1, 1932, are as follows :—

		MEN	WOMEN	CHILDREN
Low-Country	...	41 cents.	33 cents.	24 cents.
Mid-Country	...	43 cents.	35 cents.	25 cents.

It is submitted that, in this reduction of wages, the authorities have entirely jettisoned consideration of the human problem. The comforts of the dependants of the estate workers have been completely neglected. Even though every estate labourer is legally entitled to 6 days' work in the week, most of the estates are not observing the rule and it is not an uncommon practice among the estates that in order to escape even this modest arrangement, task-work, which is entirely to the disadvantage of the worker, has been

extensively resorted to. Wage-reduction on the Ceylon estates may have been adopted as a temporary expedient, but to perpetuate the present schedules would amount to legalised sweating of our workers.

In regard to the wages of our urban workers, a scheme sanctioned by the Government of Ceylon on 6th January, 1927, has endeavoured to classify the workers into specific grades and categories as skilled and unskilled, with maximum and minimum daily rates of wages. This scheme is only limited to Government departments, but it is expected that it would exert a healthy influence over the position of our urban workers in non-Government employment.

Almost the whole of the Indian estate population is housed by the employers themselves. The houses, or labourers' lines, as they are called, conform to a standard type approved by the Ceylon Government. Considerable progress has been made with a building programme embarked upon in 1925. The needs of Indian estate labourers are thus fairly well provided for. But the case of the

urban workers, particularly in Colombo, where tenements are undesirably overcrowded, is really shabby and demands immediate attention.

The physical well-being of the estate worker is looked after by a fund, created under the Medical Wants Ordinance of 1912, amended subsequently at various dates. The Ceylon Government makes a handsome contribution to this fund. But the number of qualified dispensers and midwives available on estates is still inadequate, considering the number of potential patients and the distances to be covered. Debility, dysentery, pneumonia, enteritis and ankylostomiasis or hook-worm are the predominant diseases on estates. On the urban side, the glaring disparity among the sexes has been responsible to a large extent to the magnitude of venereal disease among our labourers. The vital statistics indicate that except the birth rate, the death rate and the infantile death rate are considerably higher than those of the all-Ceylon ratios and demand further medical and pre-natal aid and sanitary arrangements of an improved type.

Repatriation of sick Indian labourers is provided for without much difficulty. Vagrants are first sent to the House of Detention at Colombo and thence repatriated at the expense of the Immigration Fund. Increasing provision is being made for the education of the children of the estate labourers. The application of the provision in the 1927 Ordinance prohibiting employment of children under 10 years of age has necessitated further speeding up of educational facilities which are to be provided for the estates population. Suitable teachers, however, are not as yet forthcoming in adequate numbers.

All considered, labour legislation in Ceylon, despite the rapid progress it has shown during recent years, is far behind that in the West or even in our country. There is no ordinance dealing with the right of association or insurance against accidents, sickness, unemployment or old age affecting our workers in the island. These are some of the lines along which improvements ought to be made. The

*kangani's* grip of the average labourer must also be loosened in order to give the latter economic and social freedom

Apart from labourers, quite a large number of Nattukottai Chettiars and Borah merchants, who are classified under the appellation 'Indian Moors', have established themselves in Ceylon as commercial magnates and bankers. For generations together they have capitalised industry and commerce in the island, and sustained the colony's economic prosperity. Further, they have practically identified themselves with Ceylon's national future. These people refuse to be called aliens, but they are to-day faced with several disabilities. The Income Tax Ordinance of 1932 has rendered them liable to double-taxation and has almost penalised them for their establishments in India. It is expected that reciprocal arrangements between Ceylon and India would partially nullify double taxation and thus ease the situation. Again, the controversy over the Judgment Debtors' Bill is still going on and it is to be wondered whether and how far our commercial

community in Ceylon would escape the more rigorous sections of this Bill.

The recent Donoughmore constitution has been expected to yield satisfactory results for our community in Ceylon. But the provision for a declaration of intention to reside in the island with a view to settlement, which was made obligatory to Indians before they could obtain the vote, has shattered our legitimate right and hope to be considered as part of the body politic and, as such, denied us adequate responsibility in the administration of the country. The fact that Indian labourers are lacking in unity, in so far as they are segregated on estates and thus subjected to estate surveillance, is responsible for the depressing figures of the Indian electorate in Ceylon. The Donoughmore Commissioners opined that Indian labour conditions in Ceylon are far from being satisfactory and spoke of the "economically helpless position of the Indian immigrant workers, their large numbers and utter lack of organisation". Just over a lakh of individuals, which is about

11 per cent. of the total Indian population of the island, are now included in the electoral rolls. But for the inhibition among the labourers that the required declaration is inimical to their interests, they would have more readily come forward for registration and maintained greater strength in the electorate. This is one reason why our countrymen in Ceylon do not wield political power commensurate to their numerical strength and economic importance.

Another defect in the Ceylon-Indian programme is the want of proper leadership. In the last elections, 4 Indians contested the same constituency, while several other constituencies, where considerable numbers of Indians are concentrated, were completely neglected. This amounts to demonstrating the fact that potential Indian representation on the State Council has been voluntarily forfeited. This dissipation of Indian energies in Ceylon ought not to be perpetuated. The fruits of democracy are best enjoyed by organised public opinion and planned economy.

## CHAPTER IV

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### INDIANS IN MALAYA

FROM Ceylon to Malaya it is a very easy jump indeed. Even centuries before Sir Stamford Raffles acquired Singapore for the Union Jack, Indian penetration into Malaya had been effective and intimate. As in the case of Ceylon, the socio-economic system of Malaya is not far different from our own. British imperialism has remarkably triumphed in Malaya and, as in the case of other tropical colonies, Indian labour has become the concomitant of the economic imperialism of the Anglo-Saxon race. According to the 1931 census, there are 627,720 Indians in Malaya out of a total population of 4,381,342, the increase over the corresponding figures at the previous census being respectively 156,054 or 33·1 per cent. and 1,023,288 or 30·5 per cent. That is to say, the progression of Indian immigration into Malaya has, despite the



prevailing economic depression of the past few years, outstripped the natural increase of the indigenous population. As much as 70 per cent. of our nationals in Malaya are absorbed in rubber estates, tin mines, railways, Public Works Department, harbours, municipalities, sanitary and rural boards, etc., and in commercial establishments of a varied type. A considerable few are flourishing in trade, business and the learned professions.

The main administrative divisions of Malaya are as follows:

(1) The Straits Settlements comprising Penang, Singapore, Labuan, Cocos Islands and Province Wellesley, Dindings, and Malacca, forming a Crown Colony administered by the Governor of the Straits Settlements with the aid of an Executive and Legislative Council at Singapore.

(2) The Federated Malay States, including the States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang. The Governor of the Straits Settlements is also the High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States as

well as the Unfederated Malay States. Kuala Lumpur, in the State of Selangor, is the Federal Capital. Matters common to all these 4 States are legislated by a Federal Council, the president of which is the High Commissioner. Each State has, besides, a British Resident and a State Council with the Malay Sultan as its President.

(3) The Unfederated Malay States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu in the Peninsula and Brunei in the island of Borneo, are governed by their respective Sultans assisted by British Advisors and separate State Councils.

Alike with Ceylon, the administrative machinery of the Indian and the Malaya Governments is fairly extensive. At Madras and Negapatam and at Penang, Port Swettenham and Singapore, this system of parallel administrative control is adequately represented. The Labour Department of the Malaya Government, with its Commissioner, and his assistants, as well as the Indian Agent have their headquarters at Kuala Lumpur. There are a good few Indians in the Malaya.

Labour Department, but to adequately minister to the needs of Indian immigrants scattered over the numerous administrative units with their varying problems in Malaya, the Labour Department must provide for a greater Indian element in its official hierarchy.

The British India Steam Navigation Company is under contract with the emigration authorities to operate steamship service along the cross-sea routes between Madras and Negapatam and Port Swettenham and Penang which are necessarily longer than their Ceylon counterparts. Even to-day accommodation on board these ships is not satisfactory and since our emigrants are all deck passengers and most of them unaccustomed to sea-voyage, must be satisfactorily accommodated. There were altogether 54 inward voyages to Malaya and 63 outward voyages to South India in 1930. The Travelling Inspectors of the Malaya Labour Department supervise the feeding and other arrangements for assisted emigrants on board these vessels. As a result of the suggestion put forward by Mr. C. F. Andrews in 1924, 3 Female

Inspectors have been appointed in addition to the dozen and odd Male Inspectors, but it is felt that the number of Female Inspectors is not adequate to look after the needs and comforts of the female emigrants and their children. There are two quarantine camps in Malaya, the Pulau Jerajak Quarantine Station, Penang, and the Port Swettenham Quarantine Station. At these quarantine camps and emigration depots, cooked rations, according to approved diet scales, are supplied by successful contractors whose tenders have been accepted by the Indian Immigration Board. Quite a lot remains to be done in regard to adequate comforts being supplied to the emigrant labourers. Even during the boom year 1926, the contract rates for the supply of cooked rations were 29 cents and 31 cents at the immigration depot and quarantine camp at Penang, while at Port Swettenham it was only 19 cents per day per adult, which necessarily connote a cheap variety of food being served to the immigrants. The quarantine camp at Port Swettenham is

situated on low-lying ground and is liable to inundation during high tidal waves or heavy rains and floods. As such the death rates and sickness at this camp are phenomenally large. The feeding at these camps must be such as would rejuvenate the emigrants after their long and congested steamer journeys. During 1930 a new Immigration Depot was built at Singapore offering further facilities for the distribution of Indian immigrants into the peninsula.

As regards the destination of Indian emigrants to Malaya, according to the 1931 census, 383,429 or more than 60 per cent. of the total Indian population, is to be found concentrated in the Federated Malay States; 132,737 in the Straits Settlements; and 111,554 in the Unfederated Malay States. The vast majority of the Indian population in Malaya are Tamils. Telugus, Malayalees, Punjabis and Bengalees offer their modest quotas to the total. So much so that Ceylon and Malaya, on comparison, yield the same analysis and

indicate the preponderance of Tamil culture in the colonies of the Indian System.

One of the most important features of the Malay-Indian problem is connected with the proportion of the sexes. Rule 23 of the Indian Emigration Rules specifies a ratio of 1·5 men for each female "emigrant". This stipulation which is scrupulously observed in the case of Ceylon is not at present operative in the Malaya system. The Government of India have tentatively suspended this rule, in view of the fact that the Malaya service is not as popular as its Ceylon counterpart. This inequality of the sex-ratio has been the cause of anxiety both to the Malaya Government and the people of India. Surveying the post-War period we find that a certain improvement has taken place in 1928 but during the subsequent years there was a worsening of this situation. Thus, in 1930 among assisted adult emigrants the ratio was 2·3 : 1, while among the non-recruited labourers it was 4·1 : 1, thus yielding an average of 2·8 males per each female.

This analysis demands the following comment: The family principle is not operative to the extent to which it is to be found in the Ceylon system. The obvious reasons for this are the distance between the mainland and the peninsula, as well as the scanty information about the conditions of life and work in the colony which demands greater hesitation on the part of the potential emigrant than in the case of Ceylon. Secondly, the suspension of Rule 23 of the Emigration Rules has also contributed to the wide gulf in the ratio of sexes in Malaya. The third reason is the growing importance of unassisted emigration which naturally tends towards the transshipment of male labourers unaccompanied by females.

A few features of this facet of unassisted emigration ought to be examined here. In 1925 an inquiry undertaken by our Agent in Malaya into the growing popularity of voluntary emigration yielded the following results. The contributory causes have been classified as follows :

i. A *kangani* who recruits more than 20 labourers under his licence might bring persons in excess of the limit as voluntary emigrants and get commission for these persons also from his employer who is ever ready (though not during these slump years) to take as many labourers as are available.

ii. Many *kanganis* might themselves come as voluntary emigrants and bring their recruits similarly so as to derive the following triple benefits. The same remark applies to ordinary labourers who have been in Malaya and returned to India for a holiday:

(a) The inducements started by the Indian Immigration Committee of paying 2 dollars to every adult and 1 dollar to every minor dependant who goes to Malaya as a voluntary emigrant;

(b) the voluntary emigrants are free to seek the healthiest place of employment, and

(c) they can get to a place where the employer offers the best terms in



respect of recruiting commission and wages; and

iii. persons other than unskilled labourers might also come as voluntary emigrants as alleged sometimes by planters in Malaya.

There is no doubt that a progressive popularisation of voluntary emigration is sure to be a great boon to the Indian community in Malaya. For one thing, the tyranny of the *kangani*, in matters touching indebtedness and the fastening of the workers to the estate on which the *kangani* enjoys a privileged position, would be obviated. For another, a growing sense of their just rights would accrue to the emigrant labourers which would ultimately find its expression in the organisation of the Trade Union Movement even among estate workers. But, the real danger lies in the fact that a disproportionate sex ratio among the emigrants would demoralise our community in Malaya and impede their rising to their proper civic status in their land of adoption.

In these depression days, wages in Malaya call for close scrutiny. According to a

memorandum submitted by the Indian community of Perak to Sir Samuel Wilson, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, in December 1932, such a distressing rate as 20 cents per day was a very common feature on many estates. This scandalous position must be rectified.

Any discussion about wages on colonial plantations is bound to be controversial. As in the case of Ceylon, inquiries were conducted as early as 1925. At the intervention of the Government of India, standard wages of 50 cents for males over 16 years and 40 cents for females over 15 years came into force in 1926 in the "key" province Wellesley. But this standard schedule never held the prospect of being applied to all the administrative units of the peninsula. In 1927 another inquiry resulted in demarcating the country into two divisions : (a) easily accessible and fairly healthy areas ; (b) inaccessible and remote, rather unhealthy and costly areas. The rates for Province Wellesley were confirmed, but for the inland "key" State of Pahang the schedule was fixed at 58 cents

and 46 cents respectively. But this fixation of standard rates for these two "key" provinces did not in any way influence the prevailing lower scale of wages, 40 and 30 cents, in the coast districts of Selangor. The protests of the Government of India and the Indian community in Malaya secured in 1928 the prevalence of the standard rates in Selangor and in certain districts in the State of Kelantan. But evasion of the legal stipulations have been frequent, even though prosecutions by the Malaya Labour Department have had considerable elevating effect. Still, fairly uniform and comparable standards of wages for all the administrative units of Malaya are as urgent a necessity as ever.

The economic blizzard of the past two years hit Malaya hard. On 31 July 1930 an all round cut of 20 per cent. in the legal wages of Indian labourers was effected, in the "key" districts, which only meant that they came into line with the non-legalised rates prevailing in other provinces. During 1931 and 1932 the situation worsened considerably, and the distress of the Indian

labourer went beyond measure. Considering the fact that the cost of living in Malaya is higher than that of Ceylon or India, that the Indian labourer has to compete to a certain extent with Chinese labour and that he has to put by 20 dollars to earn his return passage, the cut in his wages schedule is essentially uneconomic. The restoration of the wages schedules to their former level is an urgent necessity. If it is not possible to restore the cut fully, an effort should be made at least to partially alleviate the misery of the Indian labourers and wait for the economic depression to lift.

The living conditions of Indians in Malaya also call forth severe comment. The margin of comfort available to the average Indian in Malaya, admittedly a more expensive country than India, is very slender. He is in the sure grip of the money-lender on the estate, be he a *kangani*, *tindal*, boutique keeper, or the *bania*. No amount of legal protection on paper can safeguard his interests in the colony. As in Ceylon, the Government and the public have to reckon with the

abuses in the prevailing socio-economic system. *Kappu*, fire-walking and other ceremonies, and the drink habit which are widely prevalent in Malaya make considerable inroads into the meagre earnings of the Indian labourer even during the boom periods. Standard lines on estates, medical and sanitary relief enjoined by the Colonial Government and other helpful provisions of the Labour Code have to a certain extent made living conditions tolerable on some of the model estates. But the generality of the labour force is still without any reasonable opportunity for comfortable living. Disease and infantile mortality are still rampant on the Malaya estates, and whatever hope the Indian labourer has for an un-anxious life on the estates would not continue until his morale and economic conditions are fortified. The authorities concerned would do well to bestow greater attention on these two points than has hitherto been possible.

The abnormal repatriation of Indian labourers from Malaya during 1932 may

well be a temporary feature. But even this passing phase cannot go unnoticed.\* The Malaya Government may congratulate themselves over the matter that, even at the risk of expending nearly two lakhs of rupees during the year under review, they were able to get out of an awkward situation. They may not like to see Malaya glutted with an overplus of vagrant Indian labourers, who were compelled to take recourse to this new profession on account of severe deployment on the estates. But wholesale repatriation of these unfortunate people to India does not solve the problem. For one thing, great hardship is caused to the labour force returning to India where very few prospects of ready economic absorption are in store for them. Secondly, disillusioned repatriates, such as these distressed labourers are, would naturally turn out to be hostile propagandists for further service in Malaya. Thirdly, when the

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\* According to a statement furnished to me by Rao Sahib M. Kunhiraman Nair, our Agent in Malaya, as many as 53,367 Indian labourers were repatriated to India during January-September, 1932.

economic depression lifts itself, increased demand for Indian labour would not be met even half way, thus entailing serious injury to the planting industry and to the economic stability of the peninsula in the coming years.

Instead, a more courageous and efficient policy for the Malaya planting community and the Government would be in the following direction: In principle, they must realise that the influx of Indian labourers must, as far as possible, be regarded as a possible addition to the community in general and encouraged to remain so. Despite the prevailing habit that a considerable percentage of Indians in Malaya regard the colony as a tempoary home for adventure and profit, it is possible and certainly desirable for the interests concerned to retain them on the soil, provided suitable conditions of living, security of service and other inducements are improvised. If this is looked into, the oscillations of labour to and from Malaya, which entail unnecessary expenditure, wastage and discontent, would be

obviated. During boom periods, which have been fairly cyclical during the post-War era, it may not be difficult for the planting community to meet all these contingencies. But a period of acute trade crisis, as the past three years have shown, would upset the economic and social poise of the peninsula. If the present policy of drift and temporary effort towards relief was substituted by a more courageous programme of planned economy and scientific organisation, all the harassing features of compulsory repatriation would be obliterated. The boom period must provide for the lean years to follow and a fund created on a permanent basis towards the relief of deployed workers would prove to be a satisfactory and useful solution for the distressing problem.

As for the present, unalloyed repatriation of Indian workers should no longer continue. The money spent on repatriation arrangements could have been more profitably used if the administration followed a forward policy of land colonisation, construction of



public works and similar useful undertakings. The displaced Indian labourer would find immediate relief in a temporary or semi-permanent manner as outlined above and come back to his old abode as a plantation worker when conditions improve. Neglect of this principle would be suicidal to all the parties concerned, especially when a vast field of potential resources in Malaya is awaiting exploitation.

Problems of non-agricultural Indians in Malaya require similar treatment as in the case of Ceylon. But the difference lies in the fact that in Malaya these interests have peculiar difficulties of their own. Greater civic and political franchise, facilities for education of the children of the Indian community, adequate legal protection of the vested interests of our nationals,—such are some of the important desiderata which the Indian community in Malaya have requested Sir Samuel Wilson to look into and provide for. The visit of the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies is expected to produce excellent results for

the ordered progress of the colony. If his mission succeeds in giving the Indian community equality of opportunity as a part and parcel of the body politic, there would be universal satisfaction on either side of the Bay of Bengal. The duty of the Government of India in this matter is emphatically clear. Leadership, this is what is wanted from New Delhi at the present day.

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## CHAPTER V

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### THE INDENTURE SYSTEM

**I**NDENTURE system is no longer a feature of Indian emigration overseas. As has been indicated in the previous chapters, it has no place in emigration to Ceylon. As regards the other colonies no organised emigration is permitted to-day and the indenture method was abrogated in 1921. Still, no study like ours would be complete without a survey of the indenture system, since the background supplied by this method of recruitment is still exercising a preponderating influence over the life and work of every Indian national permanently settled overseas. In this Chapter we will endeavour to discuss some of the salient features of the indenture system which is sure to help us in our approach to the subsequent chapters

The first thing we should remember in a study of the indenture system is that it was applied to emigration to distant colonies.

Perhaps, the Straits Settlements constitute an early exception to this observation. From British Guiana to Fiji, the indenture system had exercised a sweeping sway and a permanent influence upon the activities of the colonial administrations, both British and foreign.

The indenture system arose out of two principal considerations. Firstly, the destination of prospective emigrants being distant, service in such countries is bound to be unattractive. Secondly, in order to prevent Indian nationals overseas from being imposed upon, especially in view of the fact that such emigrants are ignorant and unenterprising, a specification of their rights, however meagre, was felt to be a thing to be desired. As the British Guiana Royal Commission of 1871 put it:

An indenture, as it seems to us, is justifiable, however contrary to English ideas, to insure payment by the immigrant for services rendered, that is for his passage out, which payment, it seems, can be insured in no other way. It may also be defended on the ground of his helplessness on arrival in a country; for if a man must necessarily be

dependant on others for the preservation of his health, there is no harm in recognising it by law.

This was the type of logic which introduced and sustained the indenture system for over 80 years until it was finally abolished during the post-War period.

The incidence of the indenture system to the detriment of the emigrant labourer actually commenced even before he left the shores of India. Surveying the methods of recruiting then in vogue, the Sanderson Committee of 1910 arrived at the following analysis :

A certain proportion of the emigrants are casual persons picked up in the vicinity of towns and markets by recruiters who are not altogether scrupulous as to their methods, and that they agree to emigrate without knowing much of the conditions which lie before them ; many even of the emigrants who are agricultural labourers of the congested districts leave their homes without any very clear conception of their prospects ; the recruiters do not penetrate into the villages where they are likely to meet such persons and endeavour to induce them to emigrate with their families.

They stressed the fact that there was no possibility for proper control of recruitment by

the Emigration Agent at Calcutta, while a reasonable personal contact between the recruiter and the prospective emigrant was conspicuous by its absence. The net result of this system of casual recruitment was that emigration to distant colonies was unpopular and regarded with much prejudice by the influential and respectable classes in India.

We have already adverted to what Mr. C. F. Andrews called "the artificial pressure of recruitment" in the indenture system. This, coupled with the effect of numerous malpractices in the indenture process during the early years, produced results the magnitude of which was fully borne out by statistics of indentured emigrants abroad.

It is the unanimous opinion of competent authorities that indenture was an altogether pernicious programme. The British Guiana Royal Commission wrote more than 60 years ago as follows :

The indentured system differs from slavery principally in this respect—that of his proper civil rights—those which are left to the slave, if any, are the exception ;

while in the case of the indentured labourer the exceptions are those of which he is deprived. Hence, it is the freedom of the slave and the bondage of the labourer against which all the unforeseen incidents and accidents of law must tell.

Lord Olivier, an ex-Secretary of State for India, writing in 1909, observed :

It is notable that the west Indian negro thinks the coolie more of a slave than we do. That is because the economic conditions of his life are freer than those of our own proletariat, who take themselves, as a rule, as the type of free man, and his standard of independence so much the higher. He would quite understand why the socialists call our freedom 'wage slavery'. The protection by the State of the indentured labourer in the colonies is not a domestic democratic compulsion ; it is a paternal and humanitarian compulsion ; it is imposed from without by the statesmanship of the Indian and British Governments.

But the system is entirely unfair in its incidence, since the balance of advantage in the contract lies always with the employer.

Indenture is a contract of a peculiar nature entered into, not under the common law of the country, but under a statute specially devised to meet the case. The labourer never knows to what employer he is to be allotted, being required to enter into his

contract in India, and to consent to allotment to any employer that the Protector might choose for him. Between the master and the servant, under such a law, there can be no human relationship, save as may often be observed between an owner and his cattle. And, as a matter of fact, the Indian labourer is often regarded by his employer as of less account than a good beast, for the latter costs money to replace, whereas the former is a cheap commodity. So long as breach of contract on the labourer is *always* (and on that of the employer *seldom*) regarded as a criminal and not as a civil matter, it is impossible to regard indenture in any light other than that of a system perilously approaching one of servile conditions, and this quite independently of what may obtain in other parts of the world, where conditions may be better or worse.

This is the description of the indenture-system which Mr. Hy. S. L. Polak, a co-adjutor of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa, gave in his book "The Indians of South Africa" published in 1909. (Natesan, Madras.) In Lord Olivier's statement we find official reticence fully expressed, inasmuch as his lordship was an ex-Governor of Jamaica, while Mr. Polak's gives us a friendly advocate's impressive summing up before a jury.



The law relating to indentured and ex-indentured immigrants and their descendants is supplied by Act XXV of 1891, subsequently amended at various dates. Mr. Polak opines that from a superficial point of view these legal enactments seemed sufficient to protect the interests of the emigrant Indians. " But the resident Indians regard the

system as a thinly disguised form of slavery, entirely foreign to the spirit of Indian thought and economic doctrine, and colonial feeling is largely hostile to its continuance on economic grounds. Its successful recruiting depends almost entirely upon the helplessness and hopelessness caused by prolonged death and, often, disease in the labourer's native land. The best recruiting agents are, undoubtedly, famine and want—agencies akin to those that drove Englishmen in large numbers to join Georgian armies of the Eighteenth Century to fight in wars wherein they had not the slightest interest; agencies similar to those which have, in the main, driven half the population of Ireland away from the country, mostly to the United States; agencies of like nature to those which compel many parents in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe to sell their daughters into what is worse than slavery.

What can a virtual slave expect from legal enactments? For one thing he does

not understand them. In fact, the multitude of prohibitory laws in a country like South Africa refuse to be understood even by the most painstaking of intelligent people. The introduction of a ratio of 40 women for every 100 men emigrants produced numerous hardships. Since Indian religious marriages are not recognised by law overseas, an organised sabotage of the Indian social system had been carried out in emigrant countries under the very nose of the law. Employers and their subordinates are masters in supremacy over the law. Messrs. McNeill and Chiman Lall, two Government of India Commissioners, observed in 1914 that the employer exercises quasi-judicial authority in disputes between emigrant Indians, thus setting up an invidious and harmful system of operative individual law which always accrued to the interest of the employer himself.

We have been obliged to content ourselves with quoting full excerpts from contemporary authorities for the simple reason that any other method is liable to

give us a distorted picture of the living conditions and inhibitions of our emigrant countrymen prior to the abolition of the indenture system. Abolition of reindenturing, and the gradual development of colonies of free Indians produced a crop of problems mostly emanating from the sore eye which the colonial indigenous populations developed. Even after the abolition of indenture, the psychological as well as the social environment which held sway for nearly a century persisted in continuing. Hence, to-day problems of Indian emigration in distant countries are not so much the products of current difficulties, but the net result of accumulated prejudices and hatred of over ten decades. The indenture concept is still present in the "coolie-swamy" phraseology of colonial administrations, particularly in the Union of South Africa.

On contrast, the Government of India does not possess as much facility to intervene effectively in the cause of the Indians settled in lands of the indenture category, as in the case of the colonies of

the Indian system. In Malaya and Ceylon, the *Raj* must be heard and to a certain extent obeyed before any measure touching the Indian community is passed through the legislature. If not, the Government of India would prohibit further emigration of Indian labourers to these colonies and may even threaten reprisals as was the case in 1920 when they wanted to place an embargo on rice export to Ceylon. But, in the colonies and dominions, particularly in the Union of South Africa, where Indians are permanently settled, such threats would only be scoffed at and would certainly prove futile. Hence, the aftermath of the abolition of the indenture system has not been actually helpful for the evolution of the Indian communities as healthy units in the body politic of the various countries concerned. Still, it must be remembered that the Government of India have continued to use as much pressure as would be legally and diplomatically possible in persuading the Governments concerned to view the interests of the Indian settlers with just eyes towards progressive development.

## CHAPTER VI

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### INDIANS IN THE WEST INDIES SYSTEM

A survey of the Indian emigration problems in the colonies of the West Indies System is of particular interest at the present day. It is no exaggeration to say that for all practical purposes nearly three lakhs of our countrymen are "marooned" in British Guiana, Trinidad, Surinam (Dutch Guiana) and Jamaica, while a further sprinkling scattered over the vast group of other islands are almost in a similar position. The Matiabruz incident is still fresh in our mind and has emphasized this fact that if ever a motley crowd of Indians succeeded in securing passage home as repatriates, they are up against the Indian wall of social ostracism and economic inabsorbability. Thus, while Indians from British Guiana and Trinidad are endeavouring to get out of the frying pan of colonial discomfort, they are compelled to be thrown

into the actual fire of an inhospitable home country.

Another reason for the importance of this survey lies in the fact that despite chronic economic depression and unemployment in British Guiana, there is a standing proposal that the Government of India should favourably consider the plea of the Colonial Government for further emigration of Indians after 1932. The Nunan-Lukhoo scheme for the colonization of British Guiana by suitable agriculturists from India has been unceremoniously repudiated by the Governor 10 years ago in favour of his own project for labour recruitment. The Government of India Commissioners : Messrs. Kesava Pillai, Tivari, and Keatinge, in their report published in 1924 could not come to any unanimous decision in regard to this proposal, the latter submitting a minority report of his own. In 1929, Mr. C. F. Andrews toured British Guiana and Surinam and his conclusions supply us with the latest authoritative information on the subject. It is a pity that no systematic survey of

Trinidad, Surinam, and Jamaica worth the name, besides the hurried visit of Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh to the West Indies in 1925, has been attempted from the Indian point of view since the report of Messrs. McNeill and Chiman Lall was released in 1914. However, I have had the opportunity of looking through the report of an inquiry into the conditions of East Indians in Trinidad released in 1920 by Mr. J. E. Dobbs on behalf of the Canada India League of Toronto. There is, as such, a great necessity for a comprehensive inquiry into the working of the West Indies System in so far as it affects the Indian immigrants in those parts.

The lands touched by the shores of the Carribean Sea conjure up pictures of potential plenty for prospective emigrants from India. Surinam, British Guiana and Trinidad in particular and Jamaica in general are still undeveloped from the agricultural point of view, and despite the prevailing slump in the sugar industry, a lot of potential waste is there for reclamation and

successful irrigation. In British Guiana, more than in any other country, possibilities for agricultural expansion are many, but the eternal paradox lies in the fact that while the resident immigrants from India are below the line of comfort and the respective Governments are faced with serious financial distress—such distress which does not permit any reasonable expenditure on social services for the benefit of the community, hopes are being expressed and schemes are being adumbrated for further supplies of labour. The present programme seems to be one of almost wilful neglect of the resident immigrant community in juxtaposition to roseate promises for the much needed would-be comers.

Of the 11 colonies of the West Indies System to which Indian emigration had been permitted at one time or another, only 4 claim our attention to-day. British Guiana with its 130,000 Indians, Trinidad with 133,000, Jamaica 17,500 and Surinam (Dutch Guiana) with its 35,000, constitute a ring of countries where Indians



are permanently settled, and offer us problems of an analogous nature. It is piteous reading in the address of welcome presented to Mr. C. F. Andrews in 1929 by the Indian community in Surinam that that country has been literally neglected by the Mother Country since 1913.

Unlike the South African Indian community, or even for that matter the Fijian Indians, our countrymen of the West Indies System do not suffer any disabilities of a racial or political nature worth the name. As we will have occasion to see in a later chapter, the psychological, racial and political inhibitions of the ruling race in South Africa are conspicuous by their absence in the colonies of the West Indies System. It will not be an affectation to say that our countrymen in these lands enjoy substantial equality of race, opportunity and economic effort, both on the Statute and in practice. If these three lakhs of Indians in the Carribean zone have not succeeded to the extent to which they ought to, or opportunities are available, the causes for such diminutive effort are to be found more-

in the evil effects of over 80 years of indentured struggle than in any prohibitory colonial legislation to-day. But this does not mean that the respective Governments have attained administrative sublimity in regard to the weightage of the just claims and hopes of the various communities living under their administration, including our own.

As has been already adverted to above, it is the niggardly policy of these Governments, in neglecting the health, sanitation, morale and economic incentive necessary to sustain this exotic group of Orientals in a purely Western and mixed sociological setting, that has kept our community in its present state of inefficiency. This need not necessarily mean that these Governments are ignorant or unhelpful in their policy towards the immigrant community. There is a definite and almost endemic incubus placed upon these administrations by economic deficiency of a varied type. For generations together, sugar had been the staple industry of these colonies. The discovery of beet-root has meant something like the death-knell of sugar. Even

where the British colonial sugar industry endeavoured to tone up by processes of rationalisation, foreign competition, especially from Java, has been able to undermine its efficiency and competitive production. On the reverse side, this means that the sugar effort in the British West Indies colonies has been subject to chronic defects, such as absentee proprietorship and direction from London, imperfect technique, an unsatisfied labour force, and other causes, which make for fugitive activity. Further, cyclical trade movements, especially during the post-War period, with their booms and slumps alternating with almost mechanical precision, have imposed a severe strain both upon the directorate and the labouring population, so much so that the economic face of these colonies is to-day showing signs of anæmia.

Again, numerous uneconomic sugar estates in these colonies have given place to other agricultural activities. This tendency coupled with the innate virtues of Indian agricultural husbandry left enough room for a progressive

increase in rice culture. This is the reason why nearly half of the Indian resident population in these colonies is to-day engaged in agriculture of this type. It must be remembered here that a fairly beneficial policy of land alienation on the part of the respective administrations to suitable immigrant applicants, as well as the customary practice on some of the most well developed sugar estates to grant plots of land for rice cultivation and what is called cultivation of "ground produce", has accelerated the pace with which our nationals were able to acquire considerable properties in land in the West Indies group of colonies. So much so, practically the whole of the rice industry in these colonies is to-day in our hands. In British Guiana rice is fast catching up sugar, while in Trinidad and partly in Surinam, cocoa is outstripping its erstwhile big brother. Bauxite, Balata, and coffee are all contributing to the gradual annihilation of sugar which has already shown signs of collapse due to inanition. But even these new industries are up against the rock of structural difficulties which are mainly

traceable to the defects in the relationship and control of capital and labour.

One of the most significant facts in the socio-economic system of the ex-indentured colonies is that the preponderating majority of the Indian population are colonial-born. Nearly 70 per cent. of the Indian community in the Carribean belt have no conception at all of the Motherland. Sometimes even three generations from the present one have never had any contact with India. As such two and odd lakhs of Indians in these four colonies are born in the land of their adoption, and whatever inflow of Indians fresh from the home country there might have been during recent years, it could never have significantly affected the warp and woof of the colonial social fabric. These East Indians, as they have come to be called, have adopted something like an half-baked Afro-American culture with its concomitant legion of evils such as costly apparel, rum-drinking, loose morals and no religion. Besides being completely denationalised, this East Indian community has, with very

few exceptions, been steadily on the downward path.

Competent observers have reiterated the fact that the comfortable Indian system of social and religious morals has been completely annihilated. In a memorandum submitted to Mr. C. F. Andrews in 1929 by the Hon. Mr. Sri Ram, a prominent Christian lawyer of British Guiana, protesting against any further influx of Indians into that colony, it was demonstrated that these colonies are now steeped in degradation as far as our nationals are concerned. The stumbling block in the way of any improvement in this particular seems to be the non-recognition of religious marriages, Hindu or Muhammadan, it does not matter. Until such marriages are registered civilly or are notified to the Agent-General of Immigration in the respective colonies, they are not valid in the eye of law. This being the case, it very frequently happens that unions solemnised according to Hindu or Muslim canon law are broken with impunity. Social ostracism, which has kept up the compactness of the Indian society even

under this irrational tradition, being completely absent in these colonies, it is not strange that ex-child wives and ex-child husbands openly flout their religious marriages and seek fresh matrimonial connections at a maturer age. It is comforting to notice that with the growing percentage of colonial-born children this evil custom of religious child marriages is being gradually eliminated.

Even more, parents with several children march on for fresh legal marriages in preference to their previous religious unions, thus leaving the progeny in jeopardy. When it is remembered that, under the indenture process which held the field till 1920 when it was abolished in the West Indies System, a quota of 40 females for every 100 males was fixed, this result could only have been natural. Even though this glaring disparity in the sex ratio has been gradually rectified and to-day there are over 80 females for every 100 males, the situation does not seem to have radically altered.

It is not fair to expect a community with a distinctive civilisation of their own

to completely alter their mode of living and code of morals. It has been noticed that even though Mahomedan law allows polygamy, even in India we do not find many Mahomedans with a plurality of wives. Polygamy has no place with the Indian community in the colonies. It is a real hardship for these people to be compelled to register their religious marriages in a distant land just for the sake of securing recognition for their "religious" children and to dispose of intestate property for the benefit of their next in kin. From a purely psychological point of view, it is often the case that, since the law does not recognise religious marriages, an angry or distraught spouse runs off with another merely to spite his or her former mate. And temptations are not a few in these colonies for Indians to be seduced by blacks, Chinese, Javanese and Creoles (mixed races). This glaring position must be rectified and the existing law altered, if necessary, if the situation is to improve, as it must. The Mahomedan Indian



community in particular feel aggrieved, and justly so, that while their religious marriages are suspect, they do not even possess the relief afforded in their personal law of divorce.

It is not the place here to enter into any lengthy discussion whether or not Hindus and Mahomedans, especially the colonial-born, carry with them and retain their personal law in distant lands. But it is conclusive that respect to such personal laws is necessary if the community is to live contented and peaceful.

Two more grievances belonging to the religious or semi-religious group must be noticed here. In the West Indies group of colonies, particularly in British Guiana, cremation according to Hindu rites, is under a legal taboo. It must be remembered that in each of these four colonies, the Indian community constitutes exactly 33 per cent. of the total population and as such forms a substantial portion of the same. It is clearly unmoral for any Government to inhibit any particular mode of the disposal

of the dead which is essentially sacred to the bereaved family, especially when the hygienic values of cremation are scientifically and universally recognised. This inhibition must cease if the resident Indian immigrant community is to be satisfied with the policies of the Colonial Governments, which must actually reflect the feelings and prejudices of the governed. Another frequent complaint of the East Indians is that the colonial administrations do not make even the slightest effort to meet their legitimate demand for religious holidays of their own. Even though it is recognised that the Government cannot afford to have far too many days when official work is suspended, the demand of our countrymen in this regard cannot be called unreasonable or impracticable. At least one or two principal religious occasions of the Hindus and Mahomedans must be ear-marked as public holidays, even if that be to their own special benefit.

Turning now to conditions of life and work in these colonies, we find a fairly comprehensive list of desiderata to be rectified, before

the economic position can be called satisfactory. Messrs. Kesava Pillai and Tivari in their British Guiana majority report of 1924 have, after exhaustive inquiry, come to the following conclusion :

An able-bodied man going out from India to a far off place at a distance of 12,000 miles, and working as a shovelman for 7 hours a day during the slack season, and 15 hours per day during the period of grinding, is able to save after 10 years' unremitting toil, not more than a sum of 162 dollars ; while a male weeder saves nothing but has a debt of 37 dollars at the end of the period. A female weeder fares even worse. Her budget actually shows after 10 years a deficit of 153 dollars if she gets a free return passage, or 225 dollars when her share of the cost of passage money is included. Or, to put it differently, among the three, there is a deficit per head after 10 years of 9 dollars or of 23 dollars, if the female weeder's share of the passage money, etc., is included. Further comment on the above is obviously unnecessary.

Mr. Keatinge, in his minority report, collected a symposium of opinions from competent people on the life and work of the East Indians in British Guiana, but could not come to any definite opinion about their

complete veracity. Opinions are bound to be conjectural. Still "a Missionary of long experience amongst Indians" opined that of the Indian community in British Guiana 5 per cent. are rich, 10 per cent. are comfortably off, 15 per cent. are submerged and living from hand to mouth, and 70 per cent. enjoy an intermediary position, ranging from those whose earnings enable them to live in fair comfort and save a little, to those whose earnings only just support them reasonably well. "An intelligent Indian merchant" was of opinion that 25 per cent. of the East Indians] are living in poverty. These opinions may be multiplied manifold, but do not lead us to any decisive picture of the life and work of our nationals in these distant lands, since life cannot be reduced to any statistical analysis. But the impression is vivid that Indians in the Carribean belt are far from being well provided for. As we have seen in the operation of emigration in the colonies of the Indian system, it may be perfectly true that comparatively speaking, Indians in British Guiana

may be better off after leaving the home-country than their compatriots in India.

It may be equally true that our colonial population in these lands are not as much steeped in the squalor, ignorance and poverty characteristic of our country-side. But comparisons are always invidious and do not lead us anywhere. Judged from reasonably absolute standards of life and comfort,<sup>9</sup> there remains quite a lot to be done before the East Indian community can be said to possess a decent existence. Tumble-down cottages, disgusting sanitation, filthy and scanty water supply, are some of the legacies of a nearly century old indenture system which still persist in these colonies. Estate life is perhaps a little better than life in such horridly congested towns like the Port of Spain, Georgetown and others. Here, particularly in Georgetown, the down and outs of the East Indian community muster strong and it is a pitiable sight to see these "jobbers" roaming about the place dejected, dilapidated and in vain search of jobs. Even the

slums of a highly industrialised city in the West, we are told, do not give us a more gruesome picture of human wreckage than in these urban centres of the colonies of the West Indies System.

This brings us to a consideration of the question of repatriation of East Indians back to the home country, either voluntary, compassionate or compulsory. We have already noticed the inabsorbability of repatriates by India. Equally clearly have we recognised the impracticability of East Indian labourers, even after 10 years' incessant toil, putting by sums of money for even part passage home under the differential schedules of the indenture and old repatriation laws of these colonies, in order to secure a berth on one of the periodical "return ships". A tardy reparation for this iniquitous provision has been made by the Government of India in a Notification dated 23rd March 1926, as a sequel to the visit of Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh to British Guiana 6 months earlier. Section 15 of this Notification, which was

accepted by the Colonial Government, provides that no more than 25 per cent. excess is permissible in the cost of the return passage and clothing of an East Indian, who entered British Guiana before 1926, over and above the cost of such passage and clothing at the time of his first arrival in the colony. The relief afforded by this provision would be appreciated if it is borne in mind that passage back to India which cost British Guiana Indians 53 dollars in 1911 rose to 78 in 1921, when, as is alleged; the Indian emigrants were informed prior to their departure to the colony, that they would be only required to pay 30 rupees towards their return passage. During the past 10 years freights have increased enormously, which only meant greater hardship for the prospective repatriate to foot the bill. Trinidad seems to have been more liberal in this regard, since a repatriate is only expected to pay 30 dollars irrespective of any rise in the passage money demanded by the shipping companies, the administration bearing the extra cost. As regards clothing

for the voyage, the British Guiana Government in 1921 charged 400 per cent. on the pre-War rate, while Trinidad only 50 per cent. The intervention of the Government of India in the case of British Guiana is extremely helpful, but does not solve the problem *in toto*.

When we turn to a consideration of the possibilities for education of the East Indian children as well for the exercise of civic and political franchise, we find that the situation is far more hopeful than in the African continent. There are no racial difficulties in the schools, but a standing grievance of the community is that the administrations are not as yet ready to provide for instruction of the East Indian children in their mother tongue, either Hindi or Urdu, as a second language. Mr. Andrews, than whom no better authority has ever visited the West Indian Colonies, is of opinion that the schools for the children of our nationals are few, scattered over a wide range, want adequate teaching staff, particularly Indian lady teachers, and require to be looked after



from the sanitary and health points of view. He further stressed the fact that on account of denominational fights among the various Christian missionary bodies which monopolise these schools under Government patronage. any co-related and efficient educational policy, particularly of the kindergarten type, is not possible under the present regime. Mere doles on the part of the administrations for the sustenance of East Indian schools would not relieve the present situation, and Mr. Andrews would like to have a thorough investigation of this problem with a view to a comprehensive series of reforms being put into the field for the benefit of the rising generation of the East Indian community.

As in Ceylon, the East Indian community does not take full advantage of the legal provision for their representation in the legislatures of the West Indian colonies. If ever our nationals are to fulfil their hopes to form part of the body politic in their lands of adoption, they must seize the opportunities placed before them for a

fuller civic life than has hitherto been possible. In Trinidad, Surinam and British Guiana, the administrations have done well to get the papers relating to elections printed in the vernaculars for the special benefit of the East Indian community. If universal adult suffrage is the only remedy for the fullest expression of the feelings of the various communities in any country, our countrymen in these colonies must organise themselves and agitate for such reforms, which would certainly accrue in the fullness of time. For the policies of the Colonial Governments of the British Empire are so carefully formulated that progressive evolution seems to be the keynote for social advance.

Sir Cecil Clementi, sometime Colonial Secretary of British Guiana, and at present High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States, expressed the opinion, in what is known as the Combined Court Paper of that Colony, No. 21 of 1919, that "it would, however, be sheer folly, indeed it would be immoral to take steps to introduce immigrants.

in large numbers into British Guiana, without at the same time taking the steps necessary to keep them alive and in good health". There is no doubt, as even Mr Andrews has recognised, vast scope for further emigration of Indians to British Guiana and elsewhere for purposes of agricultural colonization. But without any real guarantee that the Colonial Governments would first prove their *bona fides* by making the lot of the Indian resident population under their administration comfortable, no further emigration should be permitted to these colonies by the Government of India. The presence of an Agent of our Government in this zone, as is recommended by the 1924 report of our Commissioners, would ease the situation to a certain extent. The introduction of this principle of direct Government agency into the colonial system of the West Indies is bound to yield fruitful results. Parallels are not wanting for such action on the part of the Government of India, which must necessarily prove to be a zealous watchdog of the interests of our nationals in British Guiana, Trinidad, Surinam and Jamaica. This done, a suitable scheme of agricultural colonization by sturdy North Indian peasants would be helpful both to the emigrants themselves and to the Colony concerned.

## CHAPTER VII

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### INDIANS IN FIJI, MAURITIUS & CANADA

THE first batch of Indian indentured labourers for Fiji set out in 1879. After a depressing period of 35 years of indentured exploitation, this system was abolished in 1916. Towards the end of 1921 every Indian in Fiji attained legal freedom. The latest figures show that at the end of 1930 there were nearly 77,000 Indians in Fiji. Judged from a purely statistical point of view, the Fiji Indian community is second in importance only to the native Fijians, while there are over 7 Indians for every white colonist. From the economic point of view, Indians in Fiji can boast of themselves as having been the real saviours of the country from economic ruin. Rather more, but for the presence in the islands of our up-country stalwarts and laterly, to a certain extent, of the industrious Tamils, Fiji could never have existed at

all as the "land of promise" in the words of Sir Thomas Henley.

To clearly understand the vicissitudes of fortune gone through by the Indians in Fiji, a rapid survey of the inquiries set on foot by official and private organisations is essential. The fact that Indian emigration to Fiji had started late in the season did not in any way minimise the horrors of emigrant ships and indenture contracts. In fact, the 35 years of Indian indentured emigration to Fiji is replete with instances of unmitigated hardship and despondency of our nationals in the South Pacific. Indeed, the Indian situation during these fateful years called forth trenchant comment by the public in India, and even the Natal and the Transvaal situations paled into insignificance on comparison with their Fijian counterpart. The rottenness of the conditions of life and work of Indians in Fiji were to a large extent responsible for the embargo on Indian indentured emigration and for its ultimate abolition by the Government of India.

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Messrs. C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson were the first to unofficially visit Fiji, with the permission of Lord Chelmsford, and their report of 1915 constitutes an uncompromising indictment of the policy of the Colonial Government as well as of the indenture system. A later visit to Fiji by Mr. C. F. Andrews in 1917, prompted the Combined Women's Organisations of Australasia to send out their Commissioner, Miss Florence E. Garnham, to investigate the social and moral condition of Indians in Fiji. Miss Garnham's report is, perhaps, the only authentic document on this doleful subject. The "manumission" of Indian indentured workers in Fiji has, logically enough, led to two important strikes, one under Mr. and Mrs. Manilal in January 1920, and the other under a Sadhu named Baisisth Muni during February-August 1921. The Samabula bridge incident of 1920 which entailed considerable loss of life among the Indian colonists and the later strike under the Sadhu which was noted for its orderliness did not actually secure

for the community any tangible advantages, but resulted in the deportation of their accredited leaders and in the depression of the prevailing wages-standard. The Government of India Commissioners who inquired into the Fiji situation in 1922 produced a report which, unfortunately, the authorities did not as yet deem proper to publish.

During the past 10 years, very little is officially heard of our countrymen in Fiji, except stray correspondence between the Fiji Indian Association and the Imperial Indian Citizenship Association of Bombay, Sundry incidents near the Calcutta docks have, in 1927, induced the Government of India to persuade the Fiji Government to take back a few of the repatriated Indians. Otherwise, the situation is almost enveloped in darkness and even constitutional change of recent years in the colony do not seem to have given any real relief to our community there.

Fiji is a group of about two hundred and fifty islands, with a land surface of about four and half million acres, of which about 80

islands are said to be inhabited. Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, and Taviuni are the three islands of real importance on which practically the whole of the Indian population is settled. Suva in Viti Levu is the capital of Fiji. Sugar is the main industry of this group of islands. Next in importance come copra, bananas, rice and maize. It is recognised that in richness of soil, in equability of climate and in general health, Fiji bids fair to be honourably compared with India. As such, the Indian community in the colony is not subject to the inhospitable atmosphere of a country like British Guiana. Nature is bountiful, and man has not much uphill work to do towards its exploitation. The Indian population in Fiji has every thing for its contentment provided economic and political equality of opportunity are there.

But actually these are the two desiderata of life in Fiji. The Government of Fiji seems to have been fully imposed upon by a few capitalist concerns. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company, the Fiji-Vancouver Corporation, the Melbourne Trust and



Messrs. Lever Brothers dominate all productive activity in Fiji. Especially the C. S. R., as the Colonial Sugar Refining Company is called, being a mammoth organisation with its vast properties, light railways and sugar mills, can and does assume a dictatorial attitude. In British Guiana, the planting industry is noted for its real influence upon the labour policy of the administration. Capital is always bound to tell, just as the City of London has been noted for its influence upon British imperialism in the colonies. But the C. S. R. as a unit is able to overshadow every other institution—governmental, industrial and labour—in Fiji.

During the indenture period, it was the C. S. R. which persuaded the Colonial Government to import Indians into the colony. The vast majority of such labourers were huddled together on the properties of this sugar trust. Even though, during the indenture regime quite a good few opportunities were available for the indentured as well as the free Indians in Fiji, to acquire plots of land for agricultural activity, the Company seems to have had

manifold devices for absolute control. The prices of sugar were fixed by the Company; the wages of Indian workers were regulated by its schedules; the land policy of the Government was influenced by its own decisions; the labour laws of the country, if any, were "instigated" by its programme of action. It has the power to level up or level down, usually the latter, the economic and moral standards of the Indian Community to its own. During the strike period 10 years ago, the wages controversy was raised and settled by the C. S. R. according to its own individualistic policy, when a restoration of the wages to the pre-War standard was effected, even though the cost of living advanced a 100 per cent. and even the generous policy of Messrs. Lever Brothers to maintain the post-War Indian wages schedule was nullified. The most amazing thing about the C. S. R. was the fact that while the Government of India Commissioners were still touring the country, it was able to flout public opinion and carry on a

*fait accompli* triumphantly. Now that the indenture laws are abrogated and there is practically no trade union movement among the Indian workers, a negotiated living wage in Fiji, both for the agricultural and the non-agricultural industry, is conspicuous by its absence. As in the West Indies System, Fiji also does not possess any machinery for the establishment and periodical regulation of a minimum wage for the Indian workers. This is an urgent matter which the Colonial as well as the Indian Governments ought to look into. The position of Indians in the Colonies of the Indian System is subject to a periodical review by the Governments of India and the Administrations concerned. There must needs be an adequate machinery for a similar periodical review of the situation enveloping activity in distant lands where Indians are permanently settled.

The moral and material welfare of Indians in overseas colonies is of particular concern to us. In Fiji, the wages are low, but a considerable few among our community are doing business as planters of sugar, as traders

and merchants, while another modicum is absorbed in domestic service and recently in Government service.

On the moral side, Fiji seems to be a black spot. Disparity in the sex ratio had been characterized as scandalous during the indenture period, when one woman in the lines was expected to satisfy three or four unofficial husbands besides many other outsiders. Legalised prostitution—that is the description of a competent authority of the filthy conditions prevailing in Fiji in those days. Abolition of indenture, and the natural annual increment in the population has rectified the position to a certain extent, but until religious marriages are recognised as legal, this picture of our community's life in Fiji would not alter much. The indenture system has destroyed communal life and left social chaos, and the Marriage Ordinance of 1918, which attempted to meet the situation, has miserably failed in its task.

The education of Indians in Fiji also requires thorough overhauling. In 1930 and 1931, attempts were made by the Colonial Adminis-

tration to establish schools for Indians, and unless special institutions for girl pupils are established, the position would not improve much in the immediate future. Indian parents are not forward enough to send their girls to mixed schools, and the fact that native Fijians are there indicates the rationale of this attitude. Medical relief in an adequate measure to Indians would not be available unless Indian female trained nurses, matrons and and doctors are available in adequate numbers. Education alone can bring about this much needed reform, and in this attention to the Vernaculars is bound to have the desired effect.

Fiji Indians never had a square deal in matters connected with political franchise. The recent reforms brought about a cleavage in the Indian political public, and the 1929<sup>a</sup> and 1932 elections divided them into three political groups: non-co-operators, progressives and obstructionists. The vast majority of the Indians do not want to co-operate with the administration in running the constitution, in the same manner in which the Jaffna Tamils

boycotted the Donoughmore reforms in Ceylon during the same period. That this is the attitude shown to a Government which has recently penalised the Indian community by imposing an invidious and harmful poll-tax is not strange enough to any one who has closely followed the reactions produced in the Colonial Empires of the Great Powers.

The Indian problem in Fiji can be summed up in 4 Urdu words: *pet* (livelihood); *izzat* (respect); *insaf* (justice); and *jahaz* (shipping facilities for return home). The remedy for the present maladies in Fiji are to be found more in psychology than in material comfort, and as long as Indians are treated with a step-motherly attitude, *pace* the native Fijians and the Whites, there would not be much scope for the ordered development of the colony.

#### INDIANS IN MAURITIUS

Mauritius is an island of about 700 square miles in the southern torrid zone, due south-east of Madagascar, in the Indian Ocean. It has a population of about 400,000 of which 279,143, or nearly 70 per cent. are Indian.

The density of population in the island thus yields an average of 570 persons per square mile, certainly a high ratio for any tropical agricultural colony.

It was Mauritius, rather the sugar industry in Mauritius, which first discovered the novel idea of indenture for Indians, and, alike with the neighbouring French colony of Reunion, contrived to bring about the first shipment of agricultural peasants from our country under indenture contracts in 1842. As such, the first effects of this baneful system of socio-economy were witnessed by these Indian labourers on colonial estates. For a very long time service in the island was suspect, since money wages ranged from 3 to 4 rupees, to 6 to 8 rupees per month, according to the quality of the estates and the efficiency of the workers. Of course, approved rations in food and clothing were supplied gratis to these imported workers, and other incidental facilities such as workers' lines, medical attendance, etc., were there as usual to humour the incomers. Still, the Indian emigrants' equation of life has always

been a cash nexus to service under contract. He has gone to the colonies to earn as much and save as much as possible, so that after 5 or 10 years of his appointed indenture contract, he could return back to the mother country all the richer for his exile and his unstinted labour.

Despite this superficial unpopularity of Mauritius, the Indian resident in the island has progressed by leaps and bounds. This is the reason why, since the abolition of Indenture by the Government of India, a scheme for emigration of further Indian labourers was permitted for a period of one year in 1923 for the special benefit of the island. When Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh visited the colony in 1925, it was found that both from the numerical point of view as well as from the standpoint of economic advantage, Mauritius offered several facilities for the colonisation of Indian workers. According to the 1923 estimates, it was found that Indians controlled 42 per cent. of the total cultivation and 45 per cent.



of the sugar plantations in the island. This is perhaps an unqualified testimony to the progressive increase in the effort as well as the results of Indian adventure in any distant land. It again amounts to an unqualified testimony to the richness of resources, the cordiality of the relationships between the various sections of the population and the helpfulness of the Administration's policy in the island. It has sometimes been averred that the Indian incomer has driven out the creole or the indigenous half-caste in the same manner in which the Indians in Natal and the Transvaal are alleged to have undercut the poor White and forced him out of competitive economic existence. But we have the authority of the Sanderson Committee of 1910 to demonstrate the utter untenability of such a wayward allegation. Equality of opportunity and the fostering care of a generous Administration have helped our nationals to build up their present position on the foundation of generations of clean effort.

Mauritius, which is hailed as a haven for the thrifty and the industrious worker, has been able to come to the present level of excellence on account of one important factor. Originally a French possession, Mauritius to-day has happily blended French social equality with the Anglo-Saxon evolutionary type of political progress. There are very few pure Whites, particularly British, in the island, and the preponderating majority of "Europeans" are half-castes and colonial born with an indelible strain of the Latin race. There is complete racial parity in the island, which only means that all the sections of the body politic live as a happy family. Since there are no complexes in Mauritius, our nationals were able to gradually level up their standards of comfort to a remarkable degree. This, despite numerous cyclical depressions in the sugar industry, which is the mainstay of the island, during the past 50 years.

From the above panegyric it does not follow that our countrymen in Mauritius are not experiencing hard times at all. Of late the Indian freehold and leasehold proprietors.

have fallen into the grip of the *baillieur des fondes*, a financial agent who advances money to these needy husbandmen, who not only collects the principal and 1 per cent. more than the bank rate as interest, a brokerage of about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., but also a commission of 1 to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. on the proceeds of the gross produce raised by these people. This is the reason why there is a decrease of about 30 per cent. in the total holdings of Indians in Mauritius during the past 10 years. This must necessarily connote a process of decline, but it is very difficult to establish whether it is due to a collapse of the excellent traditional qualities of Indian prudential husbandry, or that it is but an index to the mysteries of economic submersion. We in India must watch with concern how the economic phase of Indian activity in Mauritius is going to take shape in the near future.

A competent Indian authority has recently observed as follows :

In Mauritius, Indians enjoy the same civic and civil rights as any other citizen without distinction of caste or creed. They

are governed by a common law. They are under a regime of liberty, equality and fraternity, the motto of the Frenchmen, the first settlers of the island. Indians in no part of the world enjoy the same rights and privileges as they do here in all spheres of life.

Surely, Mauritius could well be a standing example to other units of the British Commonwealth of Nations wherever Indians find themselves entrenched to-day. Helotry has been banished by this country, and this is where others have to catch up the standards thus established, under which Indian emigrants feel one with the other races living side by side with them as honest citizens striving for the commonweal of the country of their adoption.

#### INDIANS IN CANADA

The story of the 1,000 Indians in British Columbia, Canada, constitutes a unique chapter in the history of Indian emigration. Unlike every other country to which Indian emigrants were attracted, Indians in Canada have gone there entirely on their own free will and at their own

expense. It was in 1903 that the first batch of Indians set foot on Canadian soil *via* Hong Kong and the Pacific. A few sturdy Sikhs, fired by the news that British Columbia offers numerous opportunities for real adventure and economic prosperity, paid their passage to Vancouver and settled there, early to find that their hopes have not after all been extravagant. Little by little fresh groups of Sikhs were attracted to British Columbia, and soon Vancouver, Victoria and other centres in this province of the Dominion of Canada supplied homes for these people. Employment in saw mills, the lumber trade, railway construction, public utilities connected with the municipalities have all afforded good opportunities for this modest but strong Sikh community, that it was able to obtain an economically equitable wages schedule. But this peculiar Indian virtue of success proved to be the eyesore of the free and democratic Canadians and agitation was set on foot that all Indians should be excluded from the Dominion. The fact that India is a

subject country had a lot to do with the recrudescence of race prejudice, and since the people of India cannot be expected to protest even if they were hit under the belt, the Canadians scored numerous technical triumphs.

It must be remembered here that the Chinese and the Japanese are not subject to the rigours of the immigration restriction laws which both the Dominion as well as the provincial parliaments passed against the Indians. A poll-tax which was levied upon the Chinese and the Japanese has yielded to the Administrations considerable revenue. The Indian community was willing to submit itself to this penal taxation, even though they belonged to the same Empire and enjoy, in law at least, the same imperial citizenship. But complexes go deeper than legal quibbles, and Canada wanted to exclude Indians at all cost.

By 1908 the figures of Indian immigration reached their peak, 2,623, and even this modest number was felt by the Canadians

to be intolerable. By means of Orders in Council, which all the available legal tribunals pronounced to be *ultra vires*, two impossible provisions were introduced specially to exclude all prospective Indian immigrants. The "continuous voyage test" was introduced because it is practically impossible for Indians to find a ship to carry them all the way from Calcutta to Vancouver on a continuous journey. A more inhuman test is the one under which no wives and children of the Indian community would be permitted to enter the Canadian territory. A few test cases in the Canadian courts secured admission of the families of the domiciled Sikhs into Canada, but at every stage it was given out to be the outcome of special grace on the part of the administration. Even the solemn pledge given by the Administration in 1911, that in future women and children from India would be admitted to join their husbands and parents, was cruelly repudiated. Deputations and representations at Victoria, Ottawa, London and Calcutta were of no

avail, and by the time the Great War was threatening itself, the position of Indians in Canada came to a head.

In order to test the sincerity of the Canadian authorities, as it were, a band of 150 Sikhs clubbed together and chartered a Japanese ship called *Komagata Maru* and made a continuous voyage to Vancouver. But the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914 goes down to history as the "Black Hole of the Indian emigration system" in the world. Besides being unlawfully kept in midstream for a period of 6 weeks, and initially refused provisions for the ship to turn back to India, the Canadian authorities deemed it fit to order one of their armed boats to open fire upon this innocent crowd, thus flouting all ideas of common decency and legal right. The returned passengers suffered indescribable hardship, due to starvation and defeat at the hands of a Dominion administration, and not all the goodwill and effort of Lord Hardinge could pacify these stalwarts to whom honour means something sacred.



Since the *Komagata Maru* incident, numerous Imperial Conferences have discussed problems connected with Indian emigration within the Empire, the Rt. Honourable V. S. Srinivasa Sastry paid a goodwill visit to the Dominion and public agitation towards the removal of these two hardships has focussed attention upon the Indian problem in Canada. But the present position of the Indians remains where it was before the War. Indians in British Columbia have no franchise, even though they are fully qualified for it. That a democratic and progressive Dominion as Canada is guilty of this serious injustice demands emphatic protest from India, especially when numerous Canadian missionaries, traders and others are given every opportunity to free sojourn and even settlement in our country. It has been admitted even by the Canadian authorities that Indians in Canada are clean, honest and law-abiding citizens. But the tragedy lies in the fact that while aliens such as the Chinese and Japanese find immigration

laws are not stringent, common citizens of the Empire are treated worse than aliens. In a memorandum presented by the India Office to the Colonial Conference of 1911 it was stated that

while the Government of India have not taken exception to the present arrangement, it is to be noted that a British Indian subject is at present required to have more money than a Japanese alien

before he was allowed to land in Canada, and continued that "none the less it is a striking fact that British Indians are allowed by foreign countries privileges denied to them by the Dominions". Written 8 years after the first batch of Indians arrived in Canada, these observations of the India Office hold good to-day. Mere lip sympathy does not solve the problem, and if Indian stalwarts without any stigma attached to them as the remnants of an indentured population are not allowed equality of status and opportunity in the Dominions, the future of the British Commonwealth of Nations is sure to be at once unsavoury and gloomy.

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## CHAPTER VIII

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### INDIANS IN EAST AFRICA

TEN years ago, the Rt. Honorable Mr. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, C.H., with prophetic vision, declared at Bangalore: "If Kenya is lost, everything is lost." Again, in a memorandum presented to Mr. Sastri during his mission to East Africa in 1929, the Indian Association, Dar-es-Salam, submitted that

in whatever form the Closer Union is introduced in East Africa, it is bound to prejudicially affect the status of Indians in Tanganyika, inasmuch as [such] a step, under the conditions prevailing in East Africa, will eventually develop into the Kenyanization of all these countries, directly affecting the secure position and equal status of the Indians with the rest of the population under the Mandate.

"Kenyanization"—this is the danger which is to-day threatening nearly one lakh of Indians who are now settled in Kenya,

Uganda, Tanganyika, Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Zanzibar.

It is not necessary for us here to go into a historical survey of the successive stages of Indian emigration and land colonisation in East Africa. Unlike other countries, Indo-East African contact could be traced to the time of Vasco da Gama. Considerable opportunities were available for Indian penetration into East Africa through the not-inhospitable agency of Muslim Arabs during the past three or four centuries. Indians were there as adventurers even before the British secured control of these rich provinces. Even such a jingo politician as Winston Churchill admitted a quarter of a century ago that

it is the Indian trader who, penetrating and maintaining himself in all sorts of places, to which no white man could go or in which no white man could earn a living, has more than any one else developed the early beginnings of trade and opened up the first slender means of communication.

Another competent observer, Sir John Kirk, expressed the opinion that "but for

the Indians, we should not be there now," and the Sanderson Committee unequivocally affirmed the fact that

the presence of a considerable number of Indian inhabitants has been and continues to be of material advantage to the British administration of the Protectorate.

It is not necessary to further describe the tedious progress of indentured travail in these lands, but we should concentrate upon recent developments, particularly of the post-War period, affecting the life and work of the Indian community in what the Germans call *Mittel Africa*.

At the time of the Treaty of Versailles, Sir Theodore Morrison and laterly Sir Benjamin Robertson proposed that the ex-German possessions in East Africa, now known as Tanganyika, should be set apart as a special preserve for Indian colonization, particularly by the demobilised sepoys. Actually, when the League of Nations mandate for Tanganyika was being awarded, India came within an ace of obtaining it. Such an arrangement would no doubt have

enhanced Indian prestige abroad, but this ill-starred proposal, as Mr. Andrews put it, has actually stirred up trouble for our community in Kenya and the adjacent provinces.

A baseless apprehension that East Africa would be invaded by Indian colonists was the cause of all the trouble in Kenya, and during the years following the conclusion of the Great War this trouble persisted with greater tenacity. At that time Lord Delamere, Major Grogan and the Bishop of Zanzibar formed the triumvirate of White supremacy over the Indian community in Kenya. Ten years afterwards, Lord Francis Scott and his co-adjutors thought fit to take a leaf from Indo-South African history and threaten *satyagraha* in case the Colonial Office refused to be bamboozled by them.

During the intervening period, much water has flown into Lake Victoria Nyanza. The report of the Economic Commission of the East African Protectorate which was appointed in 1917, is the starting point in this controversy over the future of Indians.

in Kenya and elsewhere. The fact that two high colonial officials were members of this Commission created an impression that the *ex cathedra* denunciations of this body have Government approval, even though Mr. Amery in the House of Commons refuted any such implication. The Convention of White Associations in East Africa then took up the cudgel against Indians with remarkable consistency, even when it was proved that their hypotheses were not all correct. Lord Milner's statement of policy in 1920 has very nearly abrogated the famous policy of fair play introduced by Lord Elgin a quarter of a century earlier, and the White Paper of 1923 went a step further in its anti-Asiatic contest.

The Round Table Conference which was summoned under the presidency of Sir Edward Northey, Governor of Kenya, in 1921, at which both the representatives of the Convention of White Associations and those of the Indian community were present, ended in a deadlock and adjourned *sine die*. It was in those years that the

Honorable Mr. Jewanjee, on behalf of the Indian community, emphatically declared that the point of squeezability has been reached and if equal rights were not conceded, Indians would fight the issues with their lives. Since then, numerous inquiries have been undertaken with a view to clarifying the East African tangle. The Sir Edward Hilton-Young Commission Report on the Closer Union of Eastern and Central Africa published a scheme in 1929 for the peaceful liquidation of all the issues involved. Not satisfied with this, the Colonial Office deputed Sir Samuel Wilson, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, to embark upon the first of his now famous visits to several colonies in the Empire. On behalf of the Government of India, Mr. Sastri undertook another mission of a similar type in 1930 and his report is of the highest calibre in defending Indian rights in East Africa. The Joint Select Committee of Parliament on the Closer Union scheme sat in London during 1930-1931, and Mr. Sastri was officially briefed to represent the Indian case.



Lord Moyne was sent out in 1932 as special Financial Commissioner to evolve a scheme for the financial stability of the colonies concerned. Towards the end of that year the Indian community in East Africa, almost in despair, threatened to take recourse to passive resistance in order to achieve their just rights. Only the considered advice of Mr. Sastri and Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh, our Agent in the Union of South Africa, obtained the postponement of this important, none the less terrible, step. The European community itself promised to pit its strength against the Colonial Office and fight for its own supremacy. On a famous occasion 10 years ago, Major Grogan declared that the front door for Indian penetration into Africa has been banged, bolted and barred by the Union Government, and that the East African white community are "the guardians of the back door". This enunciation of the policy of the Kenya whites remains intact even to-day, and equally strongly does Indian opposition to this scandalous position maintain its *status quo* but even gathers

strength with the flux of time, basing its claims on fair play and justice.

In the fair name of Christianity, the Convention of White Associations in East Africa would have the world believe that these colonies were held by them as a trust for the native inhabitants and that the presence of the Indians in the country constitutes a menace to the ordered development of the African race in the land of their birth. Even more, it has been made clear that the White community is out to impose Western civilization upon the African people and for its achievement the presence of Indians in the country would be a stumbling-block. It is also averred that in the economic sphere, the Indian is driving out the African, and as such, also, the country must be rid of our nationals. These and other assumptions do not stand any close scrutiny. When Mr. Andrews visited East Africa in 1921 it was clearly established that the White community was labouring under an artificially exaggerated prejudice against the Indians and hence the above arguments were freely made use of.

In his publication on "The Indian Question in East Africa", Mr. Andrews mentions that when he was invited to be present at the Council of Ruling Chiefs in Uganda, the Prime Minister, Sir Apolo Kagwa, elicited, at his request, that the indigenous inhabitants require the presence of our nationals both from the economic and sociological points of view. The presence of the Indian in East Africa has been extremely helpful both in the economic plane, where they discharge the functions of traders and artisans, and in the social plane where they beneficially intervene between the "superior" white community and the native population. Curiously enough, when the South African Union's argument is that the Indian is competing with the white man in East Africa, this contention is pushed into the background in order to give place to the boggy that he is ousting the African from economic existence. That a lot of loose thinking is indulged in is plain from numerous other points in the stock arguments of the Whites in East Africa. Indeed, it is essentially a question of complexes which

has given rise to the present crisis in East Africa.

In a significant passage, the Hilton-Young Commission pointed out that :

The basis of a satisfactory treatment of the problems of Government in Africa must be a definite policy for dealing with what is the most difficult task, namely, the fulfilment of the Government's trust for the natives and the regulation of the relations between the natives and the immigrant communities. . . . the obligation resting on those responsible for the government of these territories should properly be regarded as a threefold trusteeship. First, for the moral and material development of the native inhabitant. Secondly, for humanity as a whole (the duty here being to develop the vast economic resources of these territories for the benefit of the whole world), a duty the conception of which has been made familiar by Lord Lugard in his doctrine of the 'Dual Mandate'. Thirdly, for the immigrant communities, whose initiative, knowledge and material resources are necessary instruments in the fulfilment of the first two tasks. *These three obligations are not necessarily in conflict. Properly interpreted, they are complementary parts of a single obligation which cannot be fully performed if any of those parts are neglected.* (Italics mine.)

In a memorandum on Indians in Kenya published in 1922, the policy of His Majesty's Government was declared to be as follows :

Whatever the circumstances in which members of these communities have entered Kenya, there will be no drastic action or reversal of measures already introduced, such as may have been contemplated in some quarters, the result of which might be to destroy or impair the interests of those who have already settled in Kenya.

Impartial observers and the Home authorities are convinced that the claims of the Kenya White community are essentially unjust and that the Indian is entitled to a square deal, no more and no less. It is strange that Kenyanization has fallen into the same error as German *kultur*, and even the certainty that the sudden withdrawal of the Indian community from East Africa would create a hiatus which can never be filled and would mean the economic collapse of the dependencies, does not induce the White community to reconsider its former untenable arguments against Indians in East Africa.

Let us now compare the demands of the Indian community in East Africa with the

counter-proposals of the Convention of White Associations, as clearly expressed in several documents. The demands of the Indian community which were enunciated during the course of the past 10 years are as follows: the right to hold any position, however eminent, in the Civil Service and local Military Forces; the right to equal representation with the European on the Legislative Council on a common franchise; the right to acquire land in the hitherto reserved portion of the Highlands; the abolition of the principle of segregation; and the right to penetrate the country in unrestricted numbers. On the European side, the demands are also clearly expressed in the form of a schedule: strictly controlled immigration at present with a view to ultimate prohibition, consistently with the principle of the Reciprocity Resolution of the Imperial Conference of 1917, and later confirmed in 1921 at the Conference of the Prime Ministers from the Dominions; two nominated and not elected Indian members in the Legislative Council;

segregation in residential areas and, where practicable, in commercial areas; no alienation of land in the Highlands to Asiatics; and, full recognition of the existing Asiatic property rights.

On comparison, it is clear that the respective views of the communities concerned are not capable of assimilation, since the whole question devolves on a just race equation, which is wanting in East Africa. Both the Indians and the Whites entered East Africa on identical lines, to profit by their industry and to also benefit the indigenous community by their liberal co-operative effort. But the White population would like to have all the plums and leave the Indian in the lurch, an essentially inequitable proposition. In their overweening solicitude for the welfare of the indigenous population, the Whites are prone to ignore that patent fact which demonstrates the point that the ruthless policy of British imperialism is fast exterminating the negroid races all over the world. The tale of Australia and New Zealand is poignant enough to convince any one of the present

danger in the colonies of the tropical belt. Indians would always be willing to be guided by principles of fair play in their dealings with the natives of East Africa, provided they are given equal opportunities with the Whites and not pushed to the background. The civilising influence of the Indian community over the Africans has been fully recognised and its continued existence is the only guarantee that the native population in East Africa would have every facility towards ordered evolution. The recent closer unity proposals have to a certain extent blurred the situation and shifted emphasis from the inherent right of Indians in East Africa to equal opportunity of life and effort, to a rather more complicated issue of imperial policy. The fact that Tanganyika is a mandate of the League of Nations held by Britain has no small significance for the Indians in that province. Under the German regime Indians, as aliens, had better rights than anywhere else in Africa, and a Royal Commission from Berlin had declared that the presence of the Indians in Tanganyika is helpful and is bound to remain so. But the



unity proposals have distorted the picture and to-day the Indian community have been compelled to dissipate their energies in a different direction.

It is impossible for us here to go into the detail of the heated controversy now going on in East Africa in regard to the closer union proposals, but the Indian case is worth looking into in summary. Mr. Sastri, in his report on his mission to East Africa, stated the Indian case as follows: The Government of India should press for inquiries as to the basis of a civilization franchise which shall be common to all races alike; invoke the good offices of the Colonial Office and of the Government of Kenya in securing the consent of the European community to the establishment of a common roll; oppose the grant of responsible Government to Kenya or of any institution leading up to it; oppose the establishment of a Central Council on the lines proposed by Sir Samuel Wilson; demand, in case of the establishment of some such body, that the unofficial representatives from each province should include an

adequate number of Indians; advocate the continuance of the official majority in the Legislative Council of Kenya; and demand that the representation of natives in the Kenya Legislative Council should be by natives, or by Europeans and Indians in equal proportions.

The Sastri Recommendations clinch the issues facing the Indian community in East Africa. It is the control of the Home Government which has so far made the position of Indians in these possessions fairly tolerable. When once responsible government has been granted to *Mittel Afrika* as a dominion, the situation which the Indian community is facing in the Union of South Africa would be repeated, perhaps with greater emphasis and injustice. The betrayal of the Kenya Indians, as well as Indians in other adjacent provinces, by the British Government is fraught with the gravest consequences for the future of the British Commonwealth, as Mr. Andrews has emphatically pointed out in his memorandum on East Africa. Religious neutrality, economic

equality of opportunity, and political justice are the three principles which have imparted cohesion to the Empire, and when once responsible government is granted to East Africa, these healthy principles would be completely abrogated and the result would be disastrous both to the Indian community and the Empire. Recently, the bait offered by the administration to the Indian community in the shape of 5 elected representatives on the basis of a communal franchise, had the effect of producing divided councils among the Indians in East Africa. After considerable delay, these councillors repudiated their mandate from the constituencies and entered the Legislative Council of Kenya which they had originally boycotted in protest. Meanwhile, the situation is hardening in East Africa, and the decision of the East Africa Indian National Congress to take recourse to passive resistance is ominous indeed. Whatever the policy pursued by the Indian community might be, it is imperative that the ranks should be closed with a view to offering a united demand for the progressive evolution of the community as an indispensable part of the body politic of East Africa.

## CHAPTER IX

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### INDIANS IN THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

**I**N his preface to the Memorandum circulated by the South African Indian Congress *anent* the Asiatic Land Tenure (Amendment) Bill of 1930, since become law, Mr. L. W. Ritch described the long struggle which the Indian community had to put up in South Africa in the following words :

In the 50 years' campaign, in which he has been engaged in sheer self-defence, the Indian's part may not inaptly be likened to an endless fight on retreat. In it, as the field of operations, the Transvaal looms largest and darkest. In the days of the Transvaal Republic, when segregation was first mooted, the relatively insignificant Indian population was yet able successfully to invoke the intervention of the British Government for its protection against differential treatment. Read to-day, when Boer whips have been replaced by Dominion scorpions, the righteously indignant protestations of Lord Lansdowne and other scarcely less important statesmen uttered on the eve of the Boer War cannot fail to furnish food for serious reflection.

Just about the same time, the Natal *Indian Opinion* editorially observed that

there are two ways open to the Transvaal Indians. One is to accept the Tenure Bill and suffer humiliations and insults ; the other is to stand as one man and take up a passive resistance movement against the Bill and fight for our rights. No nation can achieve political rights without sacrifice and suffering.

During the past 2 years, events developed with remarkable rapidity. The Second Cape Town Conference met and arrived at a settlement, the Transvaal Land Tenure Act has come into operation, the difficulties of the Indian community have been intensified, and the prospect of the *satyagraha* movement foreshadowed earlier is still imminent. The Transvaal supplies us with the proper delimitation to the Indo-South African problem at the present day.

The Cape Province, the Orange Free State, Natal and the Transvaal constitute the 4 units of the Union of South Africa, and in the aggregate contain about a 170,000 Indians at the present day. The Indian community in the Cape Province enjoy rights and privileges which are not available in any other

unit of the Union. They have both parliamentary and municipal franchise on a par with other non-Europeans. No restrictions have been placed upon them which do not also apply equally to other non-Europeans. Freedom to purchase fixed property and to trade and reside where they choose, they enjoy, and even though trade licenses are hard to get from the Administration, the general lot of our nationals in the Cape Province may be said to be on the whole satisfactory. At least, complaints against the authorities are few and far between. The Orange Free State is free only in name. The 100 and odd Indians in this territory were allowed to enter on the strict understanding that they would remain in domestic service of the European community. There is no other way in which immigration into this country may be effected.

The preponderating majority of the Indian community in South Africa is to be found in Natal; indeed, over a 140,000 of our nationals are now resident in Natal. A large proportion of this community were born in the country

itself, and since the abolition of the indenture system no fresh immigrants from India ever set foot on this part of the South African soil. In 1896 the Administration deprived our countrymen, without any justification at all, of their parliamentary franchise, but did not interfere with their rights to acquire fixed property and to trade and reside where they chose. In 1908, however, the Natal Legislature attempted to deprive Indians of the right to acquire fresh licenses for trade purposes and to prohibit them from acquiring renewals of licenses after 1918, but the Imperial Government successfully intervened on behalf of our community, so that they were left in the undisturbed possession of these essential opportunities for profitable living. During the post-War period, another attempt on the part of the White population to render the continuance of Indians in Natal as a part of the body politic impossible, did not gain anything more than the infliction of minor indignities, but the Indians continued to enjoy full municipal and township franchise equal with the Europeans, and the right to

own fixed property and to reside where they chose without let or hindrance.

As for the Transvaal, the storm-centre of the South African Union, we have about 1,500 Indians settled there. These people have never had the municipal and parliamentary franchise, while Act III of 1885 and Act XXXVII of 1919 prohibited them from acquiring fixed property. The General Dealers Control Ordinance passed in 1925 by the Provincial Legislature was intended with retrospective effect to regulate, control and restrict the grant of licenses to Asiatics in future. The Asiatic Land Tenure Amendment Act of 1932 went a step further in reducing the position of the Indian community in the Transvaal analogous to that of helots in any civilised land.

This, in brief, is the present position of Indians in the Union of South Africa. Seventy years ago the first shipment of Indian indentured labourers was allowed by the Government of India at the special request of the Natal Government. Since then, Indians in Natal and elsewhere worked



for the betterment of the territories with unremitting sincerity. Speaking in the Natal Legislative Assembly in 1908, Sir Liege Hulett, a former Prime Minister, observed :

The condition of the Colony before the importation of Indian labour was one of gloom ; it was one that then and there threatened to extinguish the vitality of the country, and it was only by the Government assisting the importation of labour that the country began at once to revive. The coast had been turned into one of the most prosperous part of South Africa. They could not find in the whole of the Cape and Transvaal what could be found on the coast of Natal—10,000 acres of land in one plot and in one crop—and that was entirely due to the importation of Indians. Durban was absolutely built up by the Indian population.

Whatever the wastage which decades of indentured labour was subjected to, it cannot be gainsaid that Indians entering South Africa on special invitation and subject to protective contracts, however defective they might have been from the Indian standpoint, have benefited the country to a remarkable extent and built up considerable vested interests.

Many of the Natal Indians freed from indenture had entered the Transvaal after its retrocession to the Boers in 1881. Their liberty, however, to acquire property and to trade was questioned by the Europeans, and despite the diplomatic attempts of the British Government to enforce the claims of its Indian subjects—claims secured under Article XIV of the London Convention of 1884—Law III of 1885 was passed imposing several invidious restrictions upon our community. The award which was made by Arbitrators in 1885 and the decision of the Supreme Court of Transvaal in 1898 virtually abrogated Article XIV of the London Convention and the rights enjoyed under it by the Indians. The heroic efforts of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa at this period are common knowledge and need not be detailed here. The Smuts-Gandhi Agreement of 1914 has worked smoothly for some time, but after the conclusion of the Great War fresh provocations on the part of the White community reduced the position of Indians in the Transvaal to one

of misery and injustice. The First Cape Town Conference of 1926, the settlement arrived at as a sequel to it, the appointment of an Agent of the Government of India in the Union of South Africa, the efforts of Mr. Sastri, Sir K. V. Reddi and to-day of Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh, and the Second Cape Town Settlement of 1932 have all been futile and the position of the Indian community in the Transvaal in particular is to-day very precarious indeed.

Any inquiry into the disabilities suffered by Indians in South Africa is bound to yield two conclusions. One is that the principal plank in the programme of the Whites and Boers in South Africa is entirely racial in character. The other is that economic justification has been taken recourse to in order to convince themselves that the presence of the Indian community in their midst is fraught with the gravest consequences for the future prosperity of the Union as a whole. On both these counts it is fortunately impossible to

convict the much harassed Indian in South Africa.

Taking the economic issue first, the following generalisations would become inevitable. In the statement submitted on behalf of the Indian interests in South Africa before the Asiatic Enquiry Commission of 1914, Sir Benjamin Robertson summed up the position in the following remarkable manner :

It is alleged, for instance, that Asiatics are dishonest as traders and are specialists in offences against the insolvency laws : but it is also complained that the wholesale merchants give better terms to Asiatic than to white retail traders. Again, it is objected in the Transvaal that the high proportion of males in the Asiatic population is unhealthy : and yet there is an outcry that they are allowed to bring their wives from India. It is complained that their trading promotes an undesirable intimacy which may even lead to 'miscegenation' : and simultaneously it is objected that they are a foreign community which will not assimilate with the South African people. The Asiatic is condemned as a bad citizen who has no interest in the public affairs of South Africa : but his aspirations for civic and political rights are regarded as a threat to the White community,

and his success in trade is dreaded as a channel through which his influence grows and expands. He is blamed as a poor spender: but any attempt to find an outlet for expenditure is either resented or prohibited. He is told that he ought to invest more money in the country: but he is prevented from acquiring fixed property by special legislation in the Transvaal, while in Natal his investments are a menace for which the only remedy is expropriation. In the Transvaal he is abused as an unproductive parasite, who does not add to the wealth of the country by farming or starting factories: but at the same time the public are warned that, if his progress as a trader is maintained, he will inevitably claim the right to manufacture what he sells; and the one Indian farm in the Province is regarded as a portent. He is condemned by the Natal Agricultural Union as an inefficient agriculturist who allows farms, which in European hands are fine properties, to lie waste and unproductive; but he is dreaded by the Richmond Agricultural Society because he produces too much and can beat the European at farming as he beats him at trading.

These illustrations can be easily multiplied several times, but are enough to demonstrate the fact that the White community in South Africa is pursuing a policy of "heads I win, tails you lose". To permanently

incapacitate the Indian community on a statutory basis, and condemn them as incapable of forming a useful part of the body politic tantamounts to having a thing both ways. As Mr. L. E. Neame put it:

A decision against Asiatic immigration in the colonies is in no way due to a lack of appreciation of Asiatic virtues; it is rather a testimonial to Asiatic capacity for succeeding.

The whole problem of Indian economic activity devolves upon the attitude pursued by the Labour Party (White) in the Union of South Africa. It is notorious that even the gradual development of socialist practice in the Union is not able to prevent the White labourers from sweating the negro and Indian working population. Equal work for equal pay does not prevail as a guiding principle in the Union, and while the White community are eager to reduce costs by employing black or brown labour, they are unreasonably emphatic in alleging that these two communities are undercutting the White worker and pushing him to the wall. In the Cape Province

admission of Indians to some of the trade unions has been found to be beneficial to all concerned. An extension of this principle to the other provinces is bound to yield useful results.

Actually, there cannot be any competition between the Indian and the White labourer or artisan. In their telegraphic protest to the Union Government, the Government of India declared in 1926 that they were

unable to find any justification for the general opinion held by Europeans in Natal that Indian competition in trade is increasing, and is closing fruitful avenues of employment to Europeans.

The truth of the situation is that the Whites, Indians and Blacks perform work of a fully complementary nature. The absence of the Indians from the South African scene would mean the paralysis of the economic and social system prevailing there. So to speak, Indians in the Union are *liaison* between the other two communities. This must be recognised to be a just statement of the actual situation in South Africa.

As regards the other plank in the policy of the South African Whites, considerations of race and nationality play a very important part. In a previous chapter we have seen that any policy based on racial complexes is bound to be unjust in its incidence upon the Indian community. It is unfair to suggest that the Indian has a very low standard of life and as such tends to depress the standard of the White community. What about the other Asiatics: Chinese and Japanese and Arabs, who are tolerated much better than the Indians? It was only very recently that the Government of the Union and of Japan have entered into a "Gentlemen's Agreement" in regard to further immigration of Japanese nationals into South Africa on certain conditions. These fresh immigrants are foreigners and demonstrably do not possess any superior traits of character from the view-point of civilization. Yet, they are tolerated, nay even encouraged to remain in the Union.

At the Imperial Conference of 1911, the Earl of Crewe, Secretary of State for India, made a noble effort to demonstrate the utter



untenability of the differential equation of standards of living in the following manner :

There is nothing morally wrong in a man being a vegetarian and a teetotaler, and his wife and family also, and being able to live very much more cheaply than people who adopt the European standard of comfort. . . . If a man is content on rice and water, and does not require pork, beef, and rum, he naturally is able to support his family on a very much lower scale. Consequently, you have to convert the entire Indian nation to a theory of economics which they do not hold at present and to which I think it would be extremely difficult to convert them.

Bishop Frederick Fisher has recently observed that "the liquor bill of the white South African citizens is colossal", a statement which is but an index to the improvident ways of living to which the Indian settler is expected to conform. The poor Whites in the Union cannot hope to sustain their activities without these despised Indians.

The race line is becoming more and more prominent in South Africa and is bound to flare up into something dreadful in the near future if no immediate break is applied to the present policy of indiscriminate race

persecution. The Indian community at the instance of the Home Government have agreed to the first Cape Town Agreement which has, among others, laid down the following principles for future activity: The Indian community would be regarded as part of the body politic in South Africa; every effort would be made to facilitate repatriation of Indians back to the mother country; the Government of the Union would endeavour its level best to uplift the Indians wishing to remain in the land with a view to bring them up to the standards of civilization and economic effort of the White community. In accepting these, especially the last clause, our nationals in South Africa have sacrificed a tremendous amount of national prestige, since a jettisoning of the cultural and civilization standards of the mother country cannot be measured in terms of money.

But the Cape Town Agreement has been recently scrapped. With it the Smuts-Gandhi Agreement of 1914 was also given the go-by, by the ultra-nationalistic and Boer Government of recent years. The upliftment

clause of the First Cape Town Agreement has been completely neglected, and facilities for the education and moral and sanitary improvement of the Indian community, even in a really Indian town as Durban, have been conspicuous by their absence. "Recruiting" of South African Indians with a view to their repatriation back to India, with free passage and a bonus of 21 pounds sterling, has been attempted with but scant success. The Smuts-Gandhi agreement which stipulated that no further legislation would be undertaken with a view to impose fresh disabilities upon the Indian community has been put on the scrap-heap. Now, certain of the sections of the Gold Laws of Transvaal which have fallen into disuse for decades have been put into operation with a view to prohibit even proprietary rights acquired by Indians under trust or in the name of corporations. To crown all, the Asiatic Land Tenure Amendment Act of 1932 has been put into operation, and the expected relief from the Feetham Commission has been found to be illusory

and ineffective. In every way, the cordon is being drawn round the Indian community for its ultimate extinction.

The most amazing thing about the South African situation is that Indians who are not wanting any further facilities for fresh immigration, are being treated as aliens by Dr. Malan and his co-adjutors. This is a travesty of even the most elementary principles of international law. The Government of India have emphatically protested to the Union Government in the following words:

“ . . . nearly 63 per cent. of the resident Indian population was born in South Africa, and the majority of that element regard that country as their home, and hardly likely to return to India unless compelled to do so. We question whether this Indian population . . . can justly be regarded as an alien element. Bulk of them have settled in Union for long periods, have in their own respective spheres contributed to development of country, and proved their value to the other elements in the population. They have acquired vested interests and established manifold associations, severance of which will be a source of distress to many and

great economic dislocation and loss. As British subjects in South Africa, they, we submit, are entitled to look upon the Union Government as the trustee of their interests equally with other elements in the population.

Any future settlement of the Indo-South African problem must be based on a recognition of this elementary principle of citizenship.

The imperial perspective is an exploded theory in the Union of South Africa. Too much harping upon this idea has already done much harm to the cause of our nationals. Indians in the Union do not want any special consideration on charitable grounds. What they want is recognition of their rights as human beings and as citizens of the land. Any day, the Union might secede from the British Commonwealth, and in that eventuality the Indian question in South Africa would develop into a first class international problem. The Reciprocity Resolution of 1918 at the Imperial Conference may be pressed into the service of the Union.

Government to discriminate against the Indian population, but Mr. Burton's commitment and pledge that they would be treated as citizens of the country and would not be penalised for being coloured people is there to convince the world of the justness of our claims. The resolutions of the International Conference on Immigration and Emigration, which were accepted at Rome in 1924 both by the Indian and the Union Governments, are there to lift the Indo-South African question to an international plane. India and the Indian community in South Africa should more and more look to the Hague and the Permanent Court of International Justice than to London and the Privy Council for adjudication of the present dispute in case such an occasion, as is bound to be in the near future, arises. Even under the present imperfect constitution when the Government of India is not a people's Government, our Administration has put up a strenuous fight for the recognition by the Union authorities of the just claims of Indians in South Africa. In this, they

have the co-operation of the entire nation with them. It is to be expected that such co-operation would always be available in the future. If the Transvaal Indian community does not get what they are entitled to through constitutional channels, the Government and the people of India should strengthen their hands in their resolve to offer passive resistance, both morally and materially. As Mr. Bajpai had retorted when the Paddison Committee was face to face with South African delegates, if the Indian Legislature passes an Act refusing admission to India for repatriates from South Africa, the situation is bound to be extremely complicated and, after all, compel the Union Government to recognise our rights in that country. But caution is bound to yield fruitful results. There should be no stampede on the part of the Indian community in South Africa. The innate justness of the Indian cause in the Union, as well as the tried powers of the Indian community to march on towards the desired goal with

unflinching step, are bound to succeed in the long run.

One point of considerable importance should not be lost sight of in the solution of the Indo-South African problem. During the Paddison inquiry, Mr. Duncan, a South African representative, showed his anxiety to find out if any reciprocal trade arrangements can be made for the mutual profit of both the countries. This is a subject which is worth exploring into. There is a certainty that economic advantage would always prevail over any superficial prejudices which one nation may have towards another. If a bi-lateral commercial treaty between India and the Union of South Africa can be arrived at, perhaps the Indo-South African problem would be nearer solution on an amicable basis.

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## CHAPTER X

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### EPILOGUE

**I**N the preceding pages we have attempted to review in summary the manifold problems awaiting solution in some of the important countries to which Indians have emigrated, either temporarily or permanently. Ceylon and Malaya, the West Indian Colonies, Fiji, Mauritius and Canada, and East Africa and South Africa have been discussed individually on account of the magnitude of our interests in each of them. But there are other countries in which small groups of Indians are to be found to-day, and these must be taken into consideration if we want to complete the picture.

All over the world there seems to be a widespread movement banning entry of Indians for purposes of settlement. It is small wonder that foreign countries are adopting an attitude almost bordering on

hostility towards India, since the numerous unredressed grievances in the British Commonwealth of Nations are there to strengthen their hands in their anti-Indian legislation. In the United States of America several Exclusion Acts have prevented Asiatics from entering the territory with a view to permanent settlement. Recently, Chinese and Japanese nationals have been admitted under certain conditions. But even facilities for students and tourists from India have been cut down to the minimum in this land of the free: Costa Rica, by a Decree published on October 26, 1925, prohibits the landing of Indian workers engaged under contract. In French Indo-China special regulations operate stringently against the settlement of Indians. In the Dutch Indies various Labour Ordinances impose similar discriminatory penalties over persons belonging to our nationality. In the case of Panama, Indians are excluded along with other Asiatics. Paraguay, Uruguay and even Turkey have similar legislation excluding Indian immigration. The "White Australia" policy in Australasia has held sway for long,

but the mission of Mr. Sastri in 1923 secured for our nationals considerable relief. Still, organised emigration from India to the above countries with a view to permanent settlement is impossible.

Any one reflecting over the position of our nationals beyond our territorial limits is irresistibly forced to come to two conclusions : The first is that the race complex has become deeply rooted in every country in the world. The neo-nationalism of the post-War era has been notorious for its national, which means racial arrogance in every land. This irrational insularity is at the root of the present trouble in regard to the presence of Indians in distant lands. Such is the demoralising grip of this race-complex, that even ordinary human courtesies are forgotten when a stranger appears in any country. The International Commission for Peace through Religion, recently held at Geneva, has come to the definite conclusion that this race consciousness is at the bottom of the present unrest in the world, and that the inhuman treatment meted out to coloured people in several

countries is directly traceable to it. Our experience in the Union of South Africa and East Africa also impels us to come to the same apprisement.

The other conclusion is that the Government of India, not being a national government—it is pretty certain, as far as emigrant countries are concerned—cannot effectively protect our nationals abroad. This assurance has helped these countries to carry on their organised campaign against Indians both in the economic and social planes with a view to humiliate and finally exterminate them. Further, the fact that the present Government of our country is unable to bargain successfully in the international world for just treatment of our nationals has also provided some countries with opportunities for discriminatory legislation being put into operation with impunity.

If the present impasse is to be rectified and if Indians abroad have to enjoy national honour, a double programme of a constructive character must be adopted both by the Mother Country and by the

emigrant Indian communities. There is an impression abroad that Indian emigrants overseas are drawn from the lowest strata of the Indian social fabric and as such do not represent all that is fair and noble in our civilization. This is to a very large extent true of the pre-indenture times. In this case, early Indian emigrants have no relief whatsoever, inasmuch as they were in several cases almost compulsorily transhipped abroad with the consent of our Government. After indenture was abolished, this position has been to a great degree altered and the colonial-born Indian feels, at any rate, that he belongs to an ancient civilization, even if he does not live up to it. In order to bring about a reality in regard to this view of the Indian emigrant problem, the Home country should send as many representative teachers and religious leaders as possible to uplift our overseas nationals. This is an urgent necessity at the present day.

The other line in their twin programme consists of greater leadership on the part

of our Government. Let it be said to the credit of Indian Government that in times past, as in the immediate present, it has endeavoured its level best to do all that is possible towards the amelioration of the Indian community overseas. But so far, the full national consciousness of the Indian people has not been reflected in the policy of our administrators. There is no doubt that impending constitutional changes would rectify this unhappy situation and give us a truly national government. When this eventuality takes practical shape, the people of India should strengthen the hands of the administration in fighting out the cause of our nationals abroad. Even a weak Government in China has been able to secure considerate treatment for its nationals in foreign countries, simply because it is a national government reflecting the views of over four hundred million people. A similar result can be achieved by a united India comprising a fifth of the human race.

Stricter scrutiny on the part of the present Government, in this transition period, of the

actual living conditions of Indians in overseas countries is bound to accrue to the latter's benefit. Wherever there are no representatives of our nation, the Government should appoint its Agents as it has recently done in the case of Ceylon, Malaya and the Union of South Africa. The extension of this principle to British Guiana, Trinidad, Surinam, Mauritius, East Africa and Fiji, for the present, is sure to afford relief to our resident nationals in those countries. Expense should not be a consideration in the way of this extension of the agency system, especially when the Special Commissions sent out to these lands in previous years have recommended such a step. Now that Trade Commissioners are being appointed to represent India in foreign countries, as in the case of Germany and Italy, a consular service on behalf of India ought to be a practical proposition. In the first instance, these representatives should concentrate upon problems of Indian emigration, and, later on, when a full diplomatic corps for India is put on a statutory basis, a larger amount of

relief could be accorded to Indian interests abroad.

When the New Constitution takes shape, the present congested Department of the Government of India, Education, Health and Lands, which is so far dealing with problems of Indian emigration, should give place to a more centralised and efficient Department of External Affairs. The Dominion of Canada and the Irish Free State have each a department of that type, and this precedent can be pressed into our national service for the better regulation of official action whenever Indian interests abroad are in jeopardy. An Indian minister at the head of this Department of External Affairs is bound to secure a better hearing than has hitherto been possible, and thus protect our vested interests in emigrant countries. The Indian emigration problem is bound to resolve itself into an international race problem, and a national executive at New Delhi is sure to handle it with ease and effect.



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